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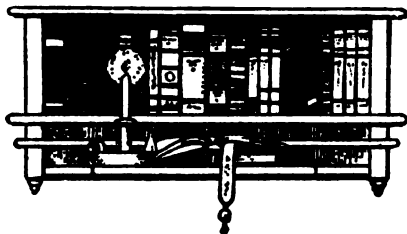
Star of The North

—
Francis William
Sullivan

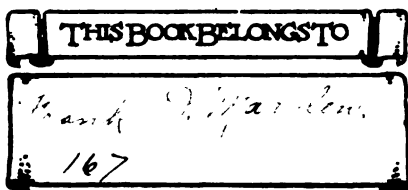


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BOOKS are keys to wisdom's
treasure;
Books are paths that upward lead;
Books are gates to lands of pleasure;
Books are friends. Come, let us read.





“Just as when he had met her first she seemed to embody the spirit of the green, wild places, so now she symbolized the soul of the frozen wilderness.”

Drawn by D. C. Hutchison.

Star Of The North

By FRANCIS WILLIAM SULLIVAN



WITH FRONTISPIECE IN COLORS

By D. C. HUTCHISON

A. L. BURT COMPANY

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FRANCIS WILLIAM SULLIVAN
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TO
ROBERT H. DAVIS
FIELD MARSHAL OF FICTION
FROM A SUBALTERN

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Star of the North

Star of the North

CHAPTER I

LOST AND FOUND

AT the director's sharp bark of disapproval, Paul Temple, who commanded more film footage and salary than any young man in the movie business, stepped back from the clutch of the leading lady. It was the second time Tom Briscoe had barked at this scene, and it was plain that the field marshal of the Graphic forces was annoyed. He sat down in despair on a fallen tree, and the whole company waited in expectant silence.

The scene was redolent of the north country it was set in. Two buckskin tepees, a smoking fire, and the usual details of a small Indian encampment, stood out vividly in the sunlight against a dark-green background of virgin

forest. And it *was* virgin forest. The Graphic Company was filming this multiple-reeler a hundred miles from the northern terminus of the railroad, and not so far south of the oft-quoted "53."

Briscoe raised a face of martyr-like patience and addressed Marguerite French, the leading lady who, garbed as an Indian maiden, stood in the camera's eye.

"No, French, that won't do," he explained, with the sweetness of despair. "This isn't Fifth Avenue, and you're not welcoming your long-lost lover in a drawing-room. That 'Oh, Gawge!' you pulled would have registered in a blind asylum. You're an Indian girl and you're bang up against the fact that the man you love has just come North after a long absence with a beautiful white wife."

He bounded up off the log and went forward with quick, short steps. Temple, a big, virile-looking man of thirty, with a kindly and rugged rather than handsome face, had drawn aside and was chatting with good-tempered Elsie Tanner, his picture "wife."

The leading woman pouted and stamped her foot furiously, to a clicking accompaniment of porcupine quills on her buckskin Indian dress. She was of medium height with a good "taking" face of conventional prettiness, and a decided temperament. Now her popular blonde tresses were covered with a coarse wig of black hair bound with a beaded fillet.

"Good heavens, Mr. Briscoe, how am I to know what you want!" she exclaimed angrily, "I can't dream it."

Briscoe, in whose side she was a continual thorn, restrained himself. He had to. The outlay for this picture, for the support of the great camp a mile away in the heart of the Canadian wilderness, and the scenes already filmed, made a row with the leading woman at this juncture impossible.

Temple sensed the highly charged state of the atmosphere and interposed. He turned to Miss French with an almost boyish smile that belied somewhat the faint look of care across his eyes and the lines about his mouth.

"Suppose we have Tom go through the

action for us," he suggested. "I wasn't quite sure of it myself."

The young woman agreed ungraciously, and Briscoe burst into new life.

"Right-O!" he shouted, and jumped forward, taking a stand in the doorway of the middle tepee. "I'm Na-shi-go the princess, and you've just come back North with your white wife, Paul. Now Elsie—" to the "wife" —"I want you to register a little more disgust at the apparent dirt and squalor of the Indian camp. This is the first time you've ever been in the woods, you know; your new sporting store clothes show that. All right, come ahead."

Tom Briscoe was not a director by chance. Before he had finished with the princess and her emotions the entire company was watching him fascinated, forgetful of his chunky body, big round head, and short legs.

"Got me, French?" he asked, bounding away to his place behind Gene Perkins at the camera, a lanky man who ground miles of

film with consistent melancholy. "Now go through it."

Somewhat humbled, the young woman rehearsed the scene creditably.

"All right," snapped Briscoe. "Now again, and this time for blood. Camera, Gene."

The minor character men and women commenced their business, the camera clicked, and the scene proceeded without a hitch.

"Fine! Now next scene." Briscoe whipped over the pages of his script. "French and Tanner. Temple, I'm through with you for this morning, and you, Walsh, and you and you," pointing out minor people. "Remember, water stuff this afternoon."

Paul Temple filled his pipe slowly as for a few moments he watched the preparations. Then he turned away and strolled back along the plainly marked trail towards camp. The forest was first growth timber of black spruce, balsam, birch, and tamarack, with a fairly thick undergrowth of hazel and blackberry, and now under the hot August sun it was sweet with piny odours.

There was in the peace of the untrammelled wild a sense of brooding immensity that awed him, for he was still new to it all. Crows cawed and fought among the tree-tops, and red squirrels chattered at him as he passed. A porcupine scuttled across the trail.

But now, alone, a change had come over Temple. The cheery exuberance that had characterized him among the others was gone, and his face had settled into lines of weariness, almost of pain. He had the look of one from whom a mask is removed.

For a few moments he walked in heavy thought. Then he brushed his hand across his eyes as if dispelling an ugly vision, and forced his thoughts back to his work.

Not since his first part three years ago had he enjoyed anything as he enjoyed the making of this picture, "Wilderness Idyl." Here was realism with a vengeance. The word had gone forth to "get the stuff," and the stuff was being got. It was a fortnight since the Graphics had left the last outpost of the railroad, and snow would fly before they saw it again.

As Temple walked softly along in his high, oil-tanned shoepacks, he saw off to the right of the trail a low, bare-topped hill which immediately suggested itself as a "location." There was to be an Indian council scene in the picture, he knew, and it occurred to him that this might do to stage it.

Turning off the trail he pushed his way through the screen of hazel bushes towards the hill. Sharp outcroppings of grey rock and wind-fallen trees forced him to take a devious course, and it was half an hour before he reached the wind-swept summit.

It was all he had desired, however, and as he plunged down into the forest again, he thought of Briscoe's satisfaction. For a long while he walked, and then, puzzled at not having struck the trail again, halted. To get his bearings he looked back towards the hill from which he had started, but this was now blocked from view by a lesser height he had circled.

For a moment he was at a loss. Then he recalled the historic advice to green woodsmen.

"I must keep to the left," he thought. "I've probably been making a circle."

He plunged on again, bearing always to the left, but after half an hour of rough going he again halted. He had not crossed the trail nor seen any sign of it. An unpleasant conviction that he was lost forced itself on him.

"Steady now," he told himself, "don't get excited," and tried to think what to do.

But nothing suggested itself. All about the inscrutable forest seemed silent as if watching him. The romance was gone from it now. It seemed a grim, relentless thing, a great web in which he was entangled.

Because motion was a relief, he plunged on. His felt hat was in his hand, and his flannel shirt was torn where thorns had plucked at it. He was ravenously hungry, and from the length of his wanderings he knew that it must be past noon. He tried to get his bearings from the sun, but doubted his own judgment. He was thoroughly bewildered.

Then the constantly recurring belief that the camp must be just a little farther, drove

him on, in a last effort. But the fastnesses seemed only to draw more bafflingly close about him.

He was fingering the revolver in his holster with the idea of firing it to attract attention, when he heard the rushing of water and went towards it. The camp was on a river, and he thought that this might be the stream.

Parting the bushes on the steep bank, he looked down and stood riveted with astonishment.

In the stony shallows at the edge of the rushing brook stood a girl, fishing. Her skirts were pinned up well above her knees and revealed black hip boots. Beside her on the rocks lay a felt hat in which was stuck a little strawberry-coloured feather from a pine grosbeak's plumage, and next it, a wicker hamper. Now as he watched she whipped her line back and forth with swift, lithe motions, and cast deftly into a pool on the opposite side.

Temple stood breathing heavily for a moment, the overwhelming surge of his relief

measuring the fear he had not dared admit before. Then weary, dripping, scratched, and torn, he started down the bank towards her.

CHAPTER II

A DAUGHTER OF THE WILD

SO loud was the chatter of the stream that she did not hear him until the stones at the water's edge crunched beneath his feet. She was reeling in her line, but at the sound she whirled to face him as by one swift movement.

"I beg your pardon for startling you," said Temple, a sorry-looking object, "but I never was so glad to see anybody in my life."

She examined him fearlessly with clear, dark eyes heavily fringed with long lashes, apparently blissfully unaware of the state of her unconventional nether garments. Her blue flannel shirt was open at the throat, and her sleeves rolled up.

"I thought you were a bear," she said slowly, "but you're a man!" Her curiosity

was childlike. "I didn't know there were any strangers in this country. Are you packing through?"

He laughed a little sheepishly.

"Well, not exactly. I'm—I'm lost and I'm terribly hungry."

"Oh!" Her small, red mouth seemed, in the forming of the exclamation, as inquisitive as her eyes. "I wondered where your duffle was. Do you mean you're a tourist up for the fishing? It isn't much good now."

Her voice was clear and cool like the water of the stream at her feet. Temple struggled vainly to accustom himself to her heaven-sent presence in this howling wilderness.

"No," he admitted again, "not that, either. I'm with a moving-picture company and we're taking a big feature film up here so as to have the atmosphere correct. I left the trail to examine a location and got lost in the 'atmosphere.'"

Her big eyes studied him gravely as she finished reeling her line.

"I don't understand a thing you're talking

about," she said coolly, "but—" with a keen appraising glance at his condition—"you're in bad shape and you said you were hungry, so I guess we'd better go home."

"Home! Do you *live* here, Miss——?"

"June Magregor is my name, and of course I live here. I've lived here all my life. I'm so sorry father is away—he's the factor at the Post, you know—because he always likes to talk with strangers. We haven't seen a real stranger like you for almost two years."

Temple couldn't resist the opportunity.

"I hope I shan't always be as much of a stranger as I am now." His quick smile revealed teeth even and very white against his deep tan.

"Oh, so do I! You're so different from anybody I've met. And now will you turn around, please? I must get my boots off."

Delighted by an ingenuousness as fresh as the air he breathed, Temple smiled and presented his back. There was a minute or two of scuffling among the stones.

"Now I'm ready," she announced serenely,

and he turned to find her in high-laced moccasins, her skirt let down. She glanced at the sun swiftly. "It's late—quarter of two at least—and we must hurry."

Temple pulled out his watch. It was seventeen minutes of the hour.

With swift, deft hands the girl packed her boots and paraphernalia into the hamper on the ground, and with one strong motion of her body swung it up to her shoulder.

"Oh, please—" he sprang forward. "I'll take that."

"Why?" she asked, frankly curious. "I always carry it. Besides—" with another appraisal of his condition—"I don't think you're up to it. You'd better let me go ahead. There isn't any trail." She turned up the bank.

Stung in every inch of his six feet of manhood, Temple followed in chagrined silence. But he had not gone two hundred yards before his mood changed to one of thankfulness. Stumbling over stones and roots with the clumsy feet of inexperience, he found himself

hard pressed to keep up with her. She walked with the springy, sure-footed stride of an Indian, and a free undulating motion that covered an amazing amount of ground.

There was no semblance of a trail, and yet she went on confidently only now and then glancing at the sun over her shoulder.

Temple was humble and exhausted, and ready to cry quits when at last she broke through the underbrush into a clearing and turned to wait for him.

"This is the Post, Fort McLeod of the Hudson's Bay Company," she told him proudly.

Temple saw a group of five or six log buildings in a sheltered, untimbered hollow several acres in extent. Two of them were large, apparently a dwelling and storehouse, and were flanked by the others. Acrid yellow wood smoke was drifting from the chimney of the dwelling.

On the opposite side of the clearing stood three large Indian tepees, their dirty-looking occupants squatted about fires. At sight of the

newcomers a number of half-starved husky dogs lifted their pointed noses into the air and howled.

"These people are the last of the summer encampment," explained the girl. "The rest have gone back to their hunting and trapping grounds."

She led the way towards the house.

"And this is where you live all the time?" Temple asked incredulously. "Don't you get horribly lonely?"

She laughed a gay, silvery laugh.

"Lonely? Why, how can I be, with the sewing and housekeeping for father, and hunting and fishing and trapping? Why, I got a hundred fox skins from my own trap line last winter."

Temple's ingrained Gotham superiority dwindled to the vanishing point as his wonder grew. Put her anywhere in the world, he thought, and she could take care of herself. Put him ten yards off the trail and he would starve to death.

In front of the house he noticed for the first

time that the clearing ran down and ended at the bluff-like bank of a broad river.

"Is that the Onipee?" he asked excitedly.

"Yes."

"Then I'm lost no longer," he cheered.

"Our camp is on that river."

"Up or down stream."

He had boggled his approach but he recovered quickly.

"The direction is a mere trifle," he grinned amiably. "The important thing is that I have found the river."

She sniffed at his evasion. "You're upstream. That explains the extraordinary things I've seen floating by for the last week. After lunch I'll paddle you up,"—Temple squirmed—"but now won't you come in Mr.—"

"I beg your pardon. Temple, Paul Temple is my name."

"Won't you come in, Mr. Temple? I know you're starving."

He obeyed with alacrity, and as he removed the stains of his hard morning in the factor's

•

own bedroom—a place of thick beams, rifles, and huge account books—he thought of her with wonder, so like a great breath of the piny air was she, wholesome, sweet, and clean.

Something strong and vital in him stirred as if from long sleep in response to her primitive appeal. After the stifling atmosphere surrounding the women he had known, her wind-swept freshness was bracing, and her virginal innocence of men a delight.

Fear seemed not to be in her. Not even at the moment of his surprising her by the brook had he detected it in her eyes.

A man's woman! he thought, and then, at the thought, another thought came, and suddenly the exhilaration died out of his face and left it set in the lines of pain that had marked it in the morning.

But again, as he had done then, he brushed the thing that haunted him aside, and with a last rueful inspection of himself in the glass, summoned the gaiety of spirits that all the world knew and loved, and went out to meet his strange hostess. Remembering his posi-

tion in his own world, he laughed inwardly at this new rôle of the greenest, humblest, and most helpless tenderfoot that had ever blundered off a trail.

But he had to admit that he had earned it.

CHAPTER III

TEMPLE GETS A LETTER

JUNE, who had changed to a becoming blue woollen dress that admirably suggested her lithe, young figure, was waiting for him in the trophy-hung living room, and at once led the way to luncheon.

Temple's impressions were brief but satisfying. Everywhere were such comfort and luxury as environment and circumstances permitted, all heightened by unerring taste; heavy, handmade furniture, many rugs of wild animal skins, rows of books along the wall. All made clear to Temple the girl's previously inexplicable refinement.

At the table she seemed a different creature from the unconcernedly booted fisherwoman who had rescued him. Without losing any of her naïve simplicity and charm, she yet filled

this more difficult office with easy skill. And pondering on this, Temple glimpsed vaguely the centuries of good breeding and hospitality that distinguish even the loneliest posts of the Hudson's Bay Company.

"Please let's eat first and talk afterwards," she said tactfully, "I'm simply famished."

He looked whimsical gratitude and put his finger on his lips as the golden glory of broiled brook trout was set before him. It was a moment for feeling rather than speech. A stout, wrinkled Indian squaw dressed in bright calico served them.

For a time they ate in silence, and finally sighed blissfully together. Then they laughed.

"May I speak?" he begged. "If I go on this way I'll be past the point."

"Yes." She pushed back in her father's massive arm-chair, seeming half lost in its masculine width.

"I'm frightfully curious, but when you spoke to that squaw did you talk to her in her own language?"

"Yes, Ojibway. Old Maria was my nurse

after my mother died, so you see I grew up speaking it. We used to be at Fort McKinnon on Hudson's Bay, but after I had finished mission school there father came inland to get away from the salt water, and Maria came with us."

"And you're not uneasy here alone when your father is gone?" he asked, thinking of the women he knew.

"No. Why should I be?" She was honestly curious. "I camp all over the place alone winter and summer. But,"—with the eager inquisitiveness of a child—"let's not talk about me; let's talk about you. Tell me again what you are doing up here. I didn't understand you at all. What is a moving picture?"

Temple's gay laugh rang out in the low, beamed room.

"A moving picture is a punishment inflicted on theatrical managers—" he began, and then stopped, shaking his head. "But no, I'll be serious. This is what it is," and, with the combined enthusiasm of a missionary

and an artist, he explained the wonderful thing, watching with enjoyment her half-bewildered interest.

And gradually as he talked, their positions of the morning were reversed. She was as much at a loss in the environment he created for her as he had been in her forests.

"You shall see a movie," he declared at the end, "if I have to send to New York for one."

She clapped her hands.

"Oh, really? How good you are!"

"Didn't you save my life?" his white teeth flashed.

"Did I? Anyway I'd have *made* you come with me. When we see a stranger we bag him and bring him home."

"And you said you weren't lonely!"

"Well, one gets tired of half-breeds and trappers, sometimes."

"Don't you ever see any—white men?"

"Oh, once in a long while when tourists or hunters go through. And in the spring when the *brigade* is ready to start for the Bay with the furs our Indians have trapped during the

winter. But they're usually men as old as father."

"I see. In the spring a young girl's fancy—eh?"

She wrinkled her nose disrespectfully.

"What on earth did Tennyson mean by that? Poets never seem to think of anything else much but love, do they? In the spring my thoughts turn to early fishing and the vegetable garden and the departure of the *brigade*."

"Oh . . . I see." Her words by some strange twist, touched a deep well of emotion in him. Somehow at that moment she made him think of dawn across a meadow or little children singing.

"Love," he said with a half-wry smile, "is something that explains itself, but which no one else can explain."

"Have you been in love?" It was the curious child again.

She saw a swift shadow cross his face, but the sun followed it.

"A moving picture actor has been every-

where," he said; and then as if a sudden thought had occurred to him: "And by Jove, that reminds me! I'll bet they've got search parties out from the camp trying to find me. I never thought of it before. And oh, Mama! I've broken up the water stuff we were going to take this afternoon, and with this good shooting light Tom Briscoe will tear out his hair in handfuls!"

A look of puzzlement had crossed her face, but now it cleared.

"Oh, you can't go shooting now," she warned him gravely. "Nothing is really very good to eat yet, you know."

He laughed out.

"Of course, I forgot. By 'shoot' I meant take pictures."

"O—oh!" A moment of silent thought. "And does fishing mean something else, too?"

"It does since I have seen you do it."

"Oh, how nice!" Her vivid face coloured with pleasure. They had finished some time since, and now she rose. "I suppose we had better go if your people will be anxious."

Getting their hats they started at once for the river. The bank at this point was steep and some thirty feet high, and bore near its top the marks left by the ice of the spring freshets. The two followed a narrow precipitous path to the water's edge, a little crescent of beach where several canoes were drawn up.

The girl indicated her choice, and together they hauled it to the water.

"Can you paddle?" she asked with a frank distrust of his accomplishments that amused him.

"Oh, yes," he said truthfully, and held the canoe steady. She leaped in sure-footedly and ran to her place in the bow.

"Keep inshore," she warned him as he pushed off; "it's much easier in the eddies between the points of land." And he felt again her mastery over him in this mysterious, outdoor world of hers.

But now his dependence seemed no longer a humiliation but an inexplicably sweet thing.

It was a two-mile paddle before, rounding a stony point, they came upon the first view of

the Graphic camp—a cluster of white tents in a green hollow between two hills on the left bank.

June gave a little exclamation of surprise and stopped paddling.

“Oh, it’s a big camp! You didn’t tell me it was so big!”

“Fifty people counting guides and cooks.”

“But what about supplies?” she asked, a little bewildered. It was her first experience with the dare-all, do-all, of the film world, and reason told her that, by all the laws of nature and experience this was a foolhardy expedition.

“Oh, that’s done up at the other end,” he told her. “They haul the stuff by team from the railroad to the headwaters of the Onipee, and send it the rest of the way by river. See, there are two scows at the wharf now that weren’t there this morning.”

They were within a few hundred yards now and the activity of unloading was very plain. Also a number of completed shacks detached themselves from among the tent colony, and

the sound of hammering told of others under construction. June asked him about these.

"They say it will be cold for the women—our women," he added hastily—"to live in tents in another month, so we're getting up the shacks. We're going to wait for winter, you know, to get snow pictures."

Suddenly there was a white puff of smoke against the green background ashore followed by the report of a revolver, and in a moment men and women appeared as if by magic, their white dots of faces turned in Temple's direction.

"By George, they *are* hunting for me," he said, and snatching off his felt hat waved it in great circles about his head. An instant later a howl of joy floated to him across the water, and the crowd commenced streaming down to the pier.

But now that he was safe, the remarks that reached him, as he drew close in, were far from sad or sentimental.

"Hey, Paul, Tom was askin' about you."

"Yeah, with a gun in each hand."

"You will waste daylight, eh? Fifty dollars fine for yours."

"Didn't I tell you not to go anywhere without me, infant?"

"Potted plant 'atmosphere' for you after this."

Paul grinned cheerfully. Beneath the chaff he felt the relief and real pleasure at his return.

As he stepped out on the pier he was overwhelmed, and for a minute was busy with his tormentors. Then another gun on one of the hills was fired.

"Calling back the search parties to make up your firing squad, Temp," drawled a languid-looking, handsome youth who wore a bright-patterned mackinaw and high yellow boots, and was smoking a cigarette. "But say," with an interested glance at June, "how do you do it, Paul? I think I'll get lost myself."

"Quite useless now," Temple returned blandly, but without warmth. He had been anticipating this development ever since sighting Jack Baillie, the Graphic's favourite "juvenile" on the pier. Then he turned to

June whom he had purposely left in the background for a moment, and held out his hand to her.

Her fingers barely brushed his as she sprang lightly ashore. She gravely acknowledged the introductions, and presently the whole group moved slowly from the wharf to the bank and up towards the tent colony while Temple narrated his adventures.

But his audience was small. June was the centre of attraction. Elsie Tanner, with characteristic warm-heartedness, had promptly attached herself to the girl, and Jack Baillie had usurped her other side, and was talking to her in a low voice with a cool assumption of intimacy that annoyed Temple.

As the crowd reached the strip of grass which bisected the camp, and which a painted board proclaimed as "Broadway," there was a whoop from the nearby woods, and Tom Briscoe bounced out through the underbrush holding in each hand a large black revolver with which he had been signalling through the forest.

At sight of Temple he stopped abruptly and rested his fists on his hips, the artillery jutting out behind him. Then he nodded his head slowly.

"Did hims little Paul run away from hims nurse and get lost in the woods?" he inquired witheringly. "You poor boob! You're fined a hundred thousand dollars! That's what you've cost me mentally today."

"I'm awfully sorry, really, Tom. But I brought home two of the grandest locations you ever heard of."

"Locations!" babbled Briscoe. "Ha, ha! I suppose you want to take me out to look at them! Ha, ha! Suicide! Not much. The company can spare you but not me. Ass!" And he went off to his tent.

But Temple was not cast down. He had felt the relief and forgiveness beneath the rasp of the little man's tongue. And he did have the locations!

At this juncture a youth who was employed in the administrative department of the camp (already housed in a large log shack), ap-

proached Temple with a bundle of letters and papers in his hand.

"Mail arrived today, sir," he said respectfully, and handed over the bundle. A ten-day mail service from the railroad terminus was the first thing Briscoe had instituted.

"Oh, fine! I'd forgotten. And thanks." Temple turned to June.

"You'll forgive me if I read my mail?" he said. "I know I'm leaving you in good hands."

The girl did not hear him, so attentively was she listening to Baillie, and Temple accepted her absorption in lieu of dismissal, and walked away, his brow clouded. He would not have chosen Baillie as her companion, but there was nothing to be done about it. Moreover, another matter of importance claimed his mind.

Had this mail brought a letter—*the* letter?

Turning off Broadway to the left, he made his way to the little tent he had the distinction of occupying alone, and sat down on a campstool.

It was a simple interior; a cot-bed on one

side, two trunks on the other, a packing box with a wash bowl on it at the far end, and, suspended above, a shaving glass. Worn earth was underfoot.

Throwing the newspapers aside Temple looked through the letters.

There were at least fifty of them, the majority addressed in round feminine handwriting—the effusions of callow girls and romantically inclined women who had seen him on the screen. He did not despise these. Through them he was able to keep a finger on the pulse of his public, and this alone made worth while to him the enormous labour of answering them.

He would read them all carefully, but not now. He put them aside and looked through the remainder, which comprised the usual miscellany. And then he found what he sought, a thick, scented lavender envelope addressed sprawlingly in blue ink.

For a minute before opening it he sat silent, brooding, his nostrils a little pinched. Then he slit it and opened the pages. The letter

was dated from his apartment on **Riverside Drive, New York City**, and began:

“Paul: No, I shall not divorce you. You can't fool me for a minute with your talk about my 'happiness.' Everybody knows that French is crazy about you, and I suppose you want to get rid of me so you can have her. Well, there's nothing doing. I have suspected you would try something like this for a long while, but I won't stand for it. I am starting for your camp as soon as I can get ready. Perhaps you will like that, you and French!

“Your wife,

“**GERTRUDE.**”

CHAPTER IV

A CLASH

TEMPLE read the brief, brutal letter twice, letting each venomous word sink into his brain. Then, silent, hurt, bitterly disappointed, he sat staring straight before him, the single sheet dangling from his fingers.

She would give him no divorce; she suspected him of an infatuation for Marguerite French; was coming here to the camp.

It was a characteristic letter, selfish, jealous, hateful. And it was Gertrude's answer to his plea for freedom, his effort to end the miserable mistake of their marriage, and rid himself of a burden that, during these last months, had grown almost intolerable.

He might have expected the refusal, he thought, and the abuse, but this threatened visit— He glanced at the letter again. "I

am starting for your camp as soon as I can get ready." The blood slowly mounted to his face and his jaw set. No, she should not do that! He would telegraph her that——

A moment's thought and he realized the futility of that. Long before a message could reach her from this isolated wilderness, she would probably be on her way to him, and, once she had started, protests would only hurry her.

A feeling of utter hopelessness settled over Paul. Always during the five years of their married life it had been the same. She had thwarted or resisted his every hope and ambition.

Five years of it! He recalled as if it had been yesterday their marriage in the Middle West while members of the same theatrical road company, and the struggle that had begun upon their return to New York. Temple had wanted a home, but Gertrude's preferences lying in the opposite direction, she had plunged into the gay night-life of the metropolis leaving him to follow or not as he chose.

The next year she had refused to go with him when he left for his season's work on the road, and then when stories commenced to follow him to the one-night stands in the country he knew that the beginning of the end had come. What the exact situation was concerning certain men he never knew and never tried to find out. But gradually as his position grew more and more unendurable, his feelings changed from love to dislike and then to repugnance.

The following year witnessed his first appearance as a film actor and Gertrude's final separation from him. Since then she had remained immovably in New York, living on the liberal allowance he made her, and appearing in several small "legitimate" parts under the stage name of Gertrude Mackay, by which she was known. To further her freedom and amusement she carefully concealed her marriage, and Paul made no effort to reveal that tragic chapter of his life. As a result the fact was almost unsuspected.

Yet despite this *status quo*, what Paul had

learned of his wife's behaviour during the last six months had driven him to action, and in the hope that she wished to marry again, he had suggested that she take up residence in the West and get a divorce. Her present letter had been the reply, bewildering, contrary, and savage.

Most brutal of all was her attack on Marguerite French. He read the charge again: "Everybody knows that French is crazy about you, and I suppose you want to get rid of me so you can have her."

Poor, vain, misguided, spiteful creature! Paul's anger gave way to a sort of pitying contempt. He knew that public and studio gossip linked his name with that of his leading lady—as always when two people worked together for a year. But he also knew that there was no truth in it. He neither loved Miss French nor she him.

A feeling of rebellion at his fate began to stir in Temple. Was he never to be free of this incubus? Was it to cling to him forever? Five years of it now and no hope of freedom in

sight. He couldn't endure much more. He was young, vital, brimming with youth and success, entering upon his best and most productive years, and this thing dragged him down like a millstone about his neck. Was he never to have another chance? Was the best and truest happiness to be denied him?

He had dreamed for years that somewhere, sometime, he should meet the one girl in the world who would embody everything for which his starved being yearned, and to whom he, too, would bring the greatest gift, and sitting in his tent, the murmurous voice of the great forest about him, he wondered if he had found her today?

At the thought of June his heavy heart thrilled with momentary gladness. He had only just met her, yet some intangible quality of hers had gone straight down to the very centre of his soul, soothing and healing him like the balm of her deep forests. Motherliness was hers beneath the fresh girlhood; comradeship, innocence; the undestroyed illusion and the unawakened response to love. After

years of the sordid tragedy of Gertrude he yearned for the wind-blown purity of June as a thirsting man longs for water.

Suddenly he was roused from his long absorption by quick footsteps outside the tent, and without as much as "by your leave," the flap was thrown back and Jack Baillie shouldered in. Startled by the unexpected entrance, Temple's hand jerked and the letter flew from it almost under Baillie's feet.

The latter stooped at once to pick it up.

"More gush from the dippy dames, eh," he said, with a twinge of envy. His own mail was very light. "Let's have a look at it."

He dropped his eyes to the sheet but on the instant Temple had leaped from the campstool and crushed it in his hand. "Forget that, Jack," he said, sharply, as he took the letter.

"Oho!" cried Baillie, half angrily, "a little touchy on that one, eh? A dark secret in the idol's past! Always thought so, but now I'm sure of it." With a forced laugh he brushed a pile of opened envelopes off one of the trunks

and sat down. "But say! that little wildflower you dug up today is some pippin, Paul. Pretty! Whew! And innocent! Say, she's got about all there is to learn!"

Paul stared at him with sudden intense dislike. Then he became conscious of how very long it was that he had left June alone.

"By George, I'd forgotten! I must go out and——"

"Never mind," Baillie assured him, cheerfully, "it's too late now. She's gone. I wanted to take her home, but she wouldn't let me, confound it."

"Gone!"

"Yes, fifteen minutes ago. Asked after you, too. But say! Do they grow many of 'em like that around here? I'll have to see more of her,—as the fellow said of the girl in the bathing suit."

With bland familiarity he rambled on, while Paul, a slow anger gathering in him, listened, controlling himself with difficulty. Baillie was a new addition to the Graphic

forces, having joined the company just before it left New York.

From the first his manner and a certain weakness in his handsome, dark face had repelled Temple, and now as he poured forth his Tenderloin rhapsodies of June, Paul felt that this impression had been well-founded.

"It's been slower than mud in this prison," confided Baillie, easily, "but now I guess I'll be able to worry along, what?"

Paul looked the other squarely in the eye.

"If I were you," he said coolly, "I'd be a little careful with Miss Magregor."

The younger man's eyes opened with astonishment.

"Well, of all the swank! What do you mean?"

"Just what I say. I don't like the way you've been talking for the last ten minutes, and I thought I'd tell you."

Baillie got up from the trunk and glowered down upon the other.

"You did, eh? Well, let me tell *you* something. You may be the star of this company

and have something to say about my work, though I doubt it, but outside of that you've nothing to say, and I'll thank you to remember the fact. I don't need your advice. I can look out for myself."

"And I'll look out for Miss Magregor since I don't think she's able to do it herself." Temple leaned back, one knee clasped in his hands, and looked up at the other with steady blue eyes in which a spark burned which had a strange tendency to curb the ardour of youth. "I'm telling you this, first, because I brought her here and feel in a way responsible, and second, because she's so different from the women that you—or I—are accustomed to. You seem to think that fact is something to take advantage of, and I happen to think the opposite. That's all."

Baillie's face flushed at the cool contempt of the other, and his thin-lipped cruel mouth set tightly.

"Suppose I give a damn what you think?" he flashed. "You think too much. You're not that girl's guardian and you can't dictate

to me. Now, you mind your business and I'll mind mine."

"Thanks, I will," Temple told him, quietly, "until your business becomes mine. Then I'll take a hand. And if I ever do," his voice raised slightly, "don't forget that I told you this today."

Baillie choked. He shook his fist in Paul's face.

"Don't you interfere with me," he threatened thickly, "or you'll get yours. I give you fair warning. If you butt into what's none of your business I'll break your head. And don't you forget it."

For a moment, with congested face and flashing eyes he stood over Paul. Then he stormed out of the tent, swearing incoherently.

When he had gone Temple sat for a little while, his face grave and thoughtful. It was not of the crumpled letter in his hand nor of the past he thought now, but of the fact that he had made an enemy. And the knowledge disturbed him, for he realized that now less

than at any time in his life could he afford any man's hatred.

But behind that fact lay another even more important, the root cause of that enmity, his swift and eager response to June. It is the fighting, protecting male that love arouses, and here not five hours after their first meeting he was championing her against the world.

With Gertrude coming (that thought never left him) could he have done two more unwise, not to say dangerous, things in one day? he asked himself.

CHAPTER V

BAILLIE SETS TO WORK

IT was several days before Temple saw June again. In that time the Graphics had filmed the delayed water "stuff" on the river near the camp, and done a pursuit by Indians through the nearby forest. It was characteristic of Briscoe that amid all this he found time to dress one of the guides as an English nursemaid and assign him to Paul as a delicate suggestion not to go plunging recklessly again through the province of Ontario.

Almost one entire day was spent by the chunky director in extracting real tears from Marguerite French. No vaseline or other fake evidences of grief would do for him. The Graphic had invested \$200,000 in realism, and realism it would have even at French's expense.

"Set for a close-up, Gene," he directed the camera man, and Perkins dragged his artillery to within a yard of the leading lady's face, a process she relished since there was neither wrinkle nor blemish on its smooth fair surface. What fear of the bench is to a baseball player the fear of the close-up is to a film beauty.

Then with a cap on the back of his head and a cigar in his mouth Briscoe wrestled with the pump handle after this fashion:

"Good God, princess, how sorry you feel for yourself! Think! That white woman has stolen your husband!" (French was still Na-shi-go.) "Every wrong that men commit has been committed against you, and you have no redress. You are an outcast among your own people. Young and beautiful, your life is ruined, and now they are going to take the baby away from you. . . ." Briscoe was walking up and down, excited and much moved. "The child is so patient and gentle. . . . It has only one pitiful little stick with a rag about it for a doll to play with, and at night its little arms steal about your neck so

warm and soft and trusting!" He turned to her, tears in his eyes. "And they're going to take it away from you, the only thing you have, your one last pitiful possession. My God, will they leave you nothing!"

He was directly in front of French now and he suddenly thrust his head forward and looked in her eyes.

"Hell! Dry as a bone!" he snorted and, drawing a handkerchief to wipe his own tears away, prepared to put on more agony.

He succeeded at last, not through tenderness but by a lengthy disquisition on French's defects as an actress. They were tears of rage he evoked, but they were tears.

"Snatch it!" he told Gene Perkins, wearily, and the precious pearls were ground into the black box to be preserved forever. . . .

Then came a day when it was too dark to "shoot," and Paul dragged Briscoe to Fort McLeod in the interest of the "location."

"Fort, me eye! What do I want with a fort? Scenario doesn't call for it," growled the director, as they walked down to the river.

Paul's answer was unintelligible. His eye was roving among the craft tied to the pier.

"Wonder where that red canoe is," he said. "These others leak. That's the third time this has happened."

"Someone else out probably."

Temple did not answer but as he took his place his face grew stern. During the recent busy time in camp, fortune had favoured Baillie in that he had not been needed for the scenes taken, and Paul had noted his almost continuous absence. Since their interview in Temple's tent, the two men had tacitly avoided each other, but neither had receded from his position.

This morning when the crescent of beach before the fort came in view the red canoe was plainly visible drawn up on the sand. Paul's jaw tightened. Baillie had a perfect right to come here of course, but he, Paul, would find out the results of his coming!

When they had climbed the steep path up the bluff and stood on the clearing before the fort, Briscoe stopped short in his tracks, his

bright eyes glancing delightedly from one detail to another of the picturesque scene.

"Great!" he exclaimed. "It's a find, Paul! Why didn't you drag me down here by the scruff of the neck? We've got to have this! That stockade, those Indians, and dogs. Oh, Mommer!"

"But you said a fort wasn't called for in the scenario."

"It isn't, but great guns, man, we'll put one in. Let me see, there's a dozen scenes that call for a trapper's cabin. We'll change 'em to this fort, and I'll work up three or four more to go with 'em. Hullo, there's Baillie. And a girl."

The couple had just emerged from the door and stood on the low veranda unconscious of the visitors. Baillie leaning carelessly against a post inclined towards June who was looking up at him as if listening intently to what he said.

"Yes, I brought her to the camp the other day, but you didn't wait to see her," said Temple, grimly. "Let's go up."

They advanced, beating off an attack of the

savage Indian dogs and June, turning at the uproar, saw them. Temple thought she gave a start, but the next instant she was coming toward them with her long, undulating stride. Baillie, scowling, followed slowly.

"You said you were coming to see me again, but you didn't," the girl said frankly to Temple when the introductions were over.

"This is the first chance I've had to pay my party call," he returned, smiling. "Will you forgive me for not seeing you before you left the camp the other day?" He wondered whether it was imagination that made him think her cheeks were flushed more than he remembered them, and her eyes brighter.

"Of course . . . but do come up to the house. Father is back, and he's so anxious to meet you." They went forward together, Paul and Baillie nodding to each other perfunctorily.

Briscoe who, oblivious of the girl after the first moment, had been examining his surroundings, broke in sharply:

"Those Indians want to earn some money?"

June laughed.

"They couldn't use it if they did earn it! Food and guns and traps are their money. Besides, they leave for their hunting grounds tomorrow."

"Humph! Don't let 'em go. How much of their time is a side of bacon and a bag of flour worth?"

She laughed again, the clear, silvery laugh that had seemed to Paul like the tinkle of one of her trout streams.

"I don't know, but I'll ask them. But come up to the house first."

As they reached the veranda there appeared in the open doorway a lean and wiry-looking man of middle height, with grizzled hair and moustache, who examined his visitors with a pair of piercing grey eyes. He was dressed comfortably in shoepacks, corduroys, and faded jacket. He welcomed his guests with the reserve of good breeding, even in offering the generous hospitality of the Northland, and spoke with a racy echo of his native Aberdeen.

"'Tis a gr-reat thing you're doin', Mr.

Briscoe, the lassie tells me," he said, instantly selecting the fountain head of the group. "Play-actin' I conseeder a work of the devil, but this, she tells me, is somethin' different. Is there money in it?"

Briscoe, who knew when patience and much talk were as good an investment as whirlwind activity, drifted with lamblike docility towards the chair the other indicated. This man was the possessor of props and scenery that the Graphic Company needed, and Briscoe intended to get them.

Paul, June, and Baillie were left together and the situation grew difficult. The relations between the men were strained, and the conversation steadily became more trite and perfunctory. Paul noticed that June seemed conscious of this; or, if not that, he thought, some influence was working in her. Her vivacity was not the ingenuous outpouring of delight and surprise that had so charmed him during their first meeting. It seemed a little forced, and a feeling grew in him that she was extremely conscious of Baillie's presence.

The symptom was as plain as day to Temple. It was the embarrassed unnaturalness of a fifteen-year-old girl experiencing her first romance. Except, he thought, grimly, June, for all her innocence and unsophistication, was a woman grown, with correspondingly deep and intense feelings.

Temple felt instinctively that he was expected to join the two on the veranda, but he sat firm as a rock where he was. This was the thing he had feared, and he determined to counteract it if he had to stay all night. Underneath his pleasant, whimsical banter a chill, sick feeling grew in him.

At last Baillie, who since the arrival of the others had been morose and sullen, made an excuse for going and disappeared towards the river. Then Temple and the girl as if by common consent drifted to the far edge of the clearing and sat down on a wind-fallen log.

"It's good to see you again," he said, simply. "Somehow you make one forget that there is such an ant-hill as New York,

and such things as struggle and hatred and disappointment."

She turned big, wondering eyes upon him.

"Do you think that! Oh, but think of living in New York! It must be wonderful. Is it true that there are buildings taller than that big tree?" She pointed.

"Yes," he said, "you could put two trees as tall on top of that one, and leave enough of the building for a thousand suffocating people to live in."

"Oh-h!" It was the exclamation of a child. "And is Broadway so bright at night that it's just like day?"

He turned to her with a kind of pity. Baillie's track was plain.

"Yes, but it doesn't prevent people shooting each other down when they want to. Why are you curious about all these things? What do you care about New York when you have this glorious, clean, free life to live?" His heart was sick within him. His predecessor had worked with the subtlest poison at his command.

"Freedom!" She said the word musingly, not passionately. "How is this freedom, when I never go anywhere, and never see anyone. There's so much to do, and know, and see, and I've had none of it. Isn't it wasting my life to stay here?"

Her gaze was troubled, and all the dreams and ideals that she had newly awakened in him cried out against that first shadow of discontent.

"No life is wasted that is happy, wherever it is," he replied earnestly. "A hundred years in New York or anywhere else could never give you the things you have now, the different things that make you seem so wonderful to me." He checked himself. "And as for the other things, the cheap and flashy things, they never bring anybody happiness. Believe me, Miss Magregor, I know."

She gazed straight before her across the clearing, her eyes vague with the awakened longings and dreams of youth. As he studied her profile it seemed as delicately chiselled as a cameo. Her hair was a soft, dark mass,

and the skin of bare throat and hands finely textured beneath its tan.

Briscoe and Fleming Magregor had left the porch now and were talking to one of the Indians near the discoloured tepee. A damp, cold wind that seemed to presage the early winter roared through the great pines and made Temple shiver despite his mackinaw. But June was oblivious of it. She spoke finally without turning to him.

"I believe you—I can't help it. But that doesn't satisfy me. Because you've known all these wonderful things, you can choose, but I haven't known them. I want to be able to choose, but I never can if I stay here. I'll be like a log that gets in a backwater in the spring; the river goes on rushing by all the time, and the log simply drifts in a circle or gets stranded. I'm stranded here, and life goes by."

Temple was silent for a moment. The flash of uncannily mature logic was unanswerable; it was the logic of youth which has burst its shell and glimpsed for the first time the possibilities that life holds.

"See here!" He made his words light with a laugh. "The day you rescued me you weren't like this. You were proud to live here and utterly happy. New York and you shouldn't be mentioned in the same breath! The blight of it has touched you now, and everything you learn about it will take away something more that you can never get back. You have lost something already."

She looked at him now, seriously, stirred by the sincerity of his feeling.

"I've lost something?"

"Yes, without knowing it; as a butterfly loses the down on its wings."

"Oh!" The comparison was of her own woods and she grasped it. She sat for a long time silent, her brow knotted, her underlip indrawn by her teeth. Then she seemed to come to some decision and her brow cleared.

"Yes, but think of all I'm gaining," she said, naively. "And now let's not be serious any longer. . . . Tell me more about New York!"

He knew then he was beaten and studied the ground before him for a little.

“Well,” he smiled, at last, “where shall we begin?”

Inside him was a gone, hopeless feeling; a feeling of futility; of beating vainly against a wall. Baillie had scored first, and with weapons more deadly than steel. Not only had he filled June's mind with the pictures most likely to impress it, but he had fired her imagination regarding himself.

Temple could see this as plainly as if she had told him, and he thought grimly that the time when the other's business should become his own was almost at hand. And beneath the mingled pity, regret, and jealousy that consumed him, every fibre of his being longed for the physical encounter between them that he knew now was inevitable.

CHAPTER VI

A REVELATION

JACK BAILLIE studied the fresh young face of the girl opposite him in the canoe. Floating idly in the still backwater in the lee of a little island, they had been fishing, but now their rods lay disused across the gunwales.

"Won't you believe I love you, June," he asked, softly, a spark kindling in his daring black eyes.

She sat looking down at her hands that were folded in her lap, grave, half-troubled, as if she were coping with a new and difficult situation.

"Yes," she hesitated, "I believe you. If you say you love me you must mean it."

"And don't you love me a little in return?" he pleaded. "I don't ask much, only a little."

"Oh, I don't know, Jack. I like you, but—

Oh, it's all so strange. Why should you love me when you've known all the beautiful women in New York!" This was not question, it was amazement.

"Beautiful!" His tone conveyed utter scorn. "Why, little girl, compared with you they're the poultry in an old chorus girls' Home. I tell you you're the prettiest thing God ever made! And you're wasting your life here." His voice softened and he leaned forward a little. "I'm crazy about you, dear, and I'm simply going to *make* you love me."

Something masterful in his voice caused her to lift her eyes and she met his with a little catch of the breath. With his sleek black hair, and handsome, imperious face he seemed to her a hero of romance, compelling and determined. She dropped her gaze again, flushed, flattered, confused.

"I don't think you ought to—talk to me that way. It isn't right, is it?"

"Right! Of course it's right! Isn't it right for a man to tell a woman he loves her?"

And if it was wrong I'd tell you just the same. Do you suppose I could help it? And now that I've told you I'm not going to let you forget it. When my work is finished here I'm going to take you away with me to New York where you belong. Why, you'd be the queen there in a week!"

"Oh, do you really think so?" Her question was eager, and her vivid face alive with the anticipation of wonders.

"Do I think so! I know it! Why, little girl,"—he put his hand out and took hers—"together there's nothing we couldn't get away with in that glory hole!"

Under his touch she sat quite still for a moment. Then, as if with an effort, she withdrew her hand from his. Was it intuitive fear or the race-old virginal recoil?

"Please, you mustn't do that," she said, very low.

A black look of chagrin passed over his face and he glanced at her keenly.

"Oh, won't anything stir you?" he asked, in a hopeless voice. "Are you made of ice? But

then I might have known you didn't love me—don't even like me." His voice trailed off tragically.

It was the old familiar flank attack of Byronic desolation and self-pity. Her quick sympathy responded with a flash of that mothering contrition that has flattered men for ages.

"Oh, I do, I do like you, better than anyone I've ever known! You must be patient with me, Jack. I never met anyone—like you before." Then her maiden reserve took command again. "And I *do* so want to go to New York! But of course I'd have to talk it all over with father. I don't know how I could leave him."

Baillie's face for a fleeting fraction of a second mirrored an expression that would have puzzled her had she seen it. Then he smiled tenderly.

"I'm sorry I was cross," he said. "My confounded temperament, I suppose. But"—his voice dropped to a confidential tone—"let's keep our little plan about New York

a secret for a while, shall we? It'll be just between ourselves, eh? Even your father shan't know. Will you do it?"

Happy once more in the sun of his good humour, she answered his smile with one equally bright.

"Oh, that will be fun. Yes, of course. And now shall we go back?"

When they had landed and climbed up to the fort, a "take" was under way in the clearing. Every day now the Graphics came down to Fort McLeod and "shot" the scenes that Briscoe's genius had devised. Now the director, with the amused factor to interpret, was instructing the Ojibways whom he had succeeded in hiring, in the "business" for the scene.

Temple saw June and Baillie arrive and his face darkened. During the days since his first talk with her he had felt that he was steadily losing ground. Though he had been with her as often as he could, the consciousness of something forcing its way between them had grown upon him.

He had not been so foolish as to argue or criticize or disparage the influence of Baillie; he had only sought by maintaining his normal gay *camaraderie* with June to offset the attentions of the other. He thought to save her not only from the man but from herself.

So far he did not believe that she really loved Baillie, but rather that her quick, untried fancy had been snared by his superficial charm. That she thought of him as a romantic figure inhabiting a desirable world and moving among great people, was evident; but this was fascination not love, Temple reasoned. A single step and the hair-line between this and infatuation would be crossed. Could he prevent it?

Paul found his position growing more and more difficult. He dared not take an aggressive part against Baillie, for he had not forgotten the event that drew nearer and nearer each day—his wife's arrival. The event was imminent now. Paul had reckoned carefully and knew that, granting her time to prepare for the trip, she must be on the next boat due

s

down river from the railroad terminus. Successive mails had brought no further word from her, and he took this to mean that she was on the way.

In that knowledge he shaped his conduct. He fought stubbornly to put from his mind any consideration of June except that of her welfare. All thought of loving her he crushed, but with a sensation of beating into stunned silence the quickest, vividest part of him.

This was possible so long as he believed that June's interest in Baillie was no more than friendly. Then, one afternoon some days later, came a revelation, a crisis, and a change.

Briscoe was in his element. The "Wilderness Idyl" was shaping up well, and the new scenes were adding just that touch of conviction his instinct told him the film had formerly lacked.

The entire company was at Fort McLeod as it had been almost daily of late. The set-up was in the clearing before the fort, and the focus lines included the front of the dwelling, half of the big trading storehouse to the right,

the Indian "village," and the inevitable background of pointed and spurred spruces.

Gene Perkins had his "still" camera (a regular plate affair for snapping the most exciting scenes) beside his big Powers, and was gauging his "shooting" distance. His large cap was turned with the visor to the back and he looked like an aviator.

"Nine-foot firing line?" he inquired of Briscoe to find out his distance from the principal action.

"Nope, twenty-five." The director ran outside one of the white tape-lines a property man had laid down, and dropped his handkerchief.

"Camera pick up anything here?" he asked. Gene sighted.

"Nope."

"All right." Briscoe turned to three or four men in trapper's costume, and beckoned them. "You fellows make your entrance from here. You come on talking together quiet enough, but when you see Baillie and Tanner come staggering in from the other side

of the clearing—they're starving, you know, and there'll be a close-up of that—you get all interest and excitement."

The native Ojibways revised their tribal ideas of war paint when they saw the Graphic feminine contingent. The women were ghastly, their faces covered with a powder, phosphorus yellow in hue. Their eyes and eyebrows were heavily blacked and their lashes "beaded." That is, by means of a toothpick with hot black wax, each lash had been gummed thick and tipped with a tiny drop of the stuff.

It was a process which lent an enlarged and starry look to the eyes, and was necessary for distance "takes." In these masks of yellow and black the women's scarlet mouths looked like fresh razor gashes.

In the midst of Briscoe's liveliest manoeuvres, June Magregor appeared in the doorway of the low, solidly-built dwelling and stood watching the preparations. One bare arm rested against the door-jamb above her head, and her slim, lithe body fell into lines

of easy grace as instinctive as those of some unwatched wild thing. The director, looking up, saw her, and his eyes lighted.

"Perfect type!" he grunted. "Half the atmosphere of the scene." Then, forgetful of half-posed groups, he hurled his chunky body in her direction.

"Morning, Miss Magregor. We're going to 'shoot' a scene with this doorway in it, and I wish you would stay right where you are and hold that pose. Will you?"

"Oh, you want me in a picture?" She was animated at once. "Shall I stay just like this?"

"Yes. Two people supposed to be starving come in from the opposite side of the clearing and I want you to stand here and watch them."

"Why, that very thing happened here winter before last!" she exclaimed, but he did not hear her. He had turned away and was beckoning Elsie Tanner.

"Make Miss Magregor up," he directed. "She'll be in the picture this morning."

Half an hour later, with a last look around, he went to a table just outside the camera lines on which were numerous scripts, weighted down against the breeze with stones. One of these was the typewritten scenario, and another a paper ruled in several columns which contained a tabulated summary by number of all the characters, costumes, and scenes. Checking briefly by this latter, he verified the layout before him.

"All ready, children!" he bawled. "Now listen. This is the story. Temple has sent his 'wife,' Tanner, south to a certain lake in care of a trapper—(that's Baillie). The princess Na-shi-go's tribe, in revenge for the fact that Temple has deserted her and married the white woman, have followed these two and stolen their camp outfit and guns. For days they have been without food, and they reach this fort in a starving condition. Got it?"

There was a general assent and he threw down the script.

"All right, then. Places!"

The two score minor people, including the

Ojibways, went through actions intended to portray the life of the post in the busy time of early summer. June, made up by this time, was in her station in the doorway.

"Is it all right?" Briscoe asked Fleming Magregor and Temple who stood back of the camera, and were judging the effect.

"Very good," both pronounced, one from the realistic and the other from the technical point of view.

"Thanks. Places again. Now Baillie and Tanner."

The two principals who were out of sight in a thicket to the extreme right, emerged wavering in their tracks and exhibiting what were meant to be signs of starvation. But Briscoe roared:

"Baillie, Baillie, you're asleep! You're dying on your feet! Remember you're *starving!* You've got the biggest belly-ache in the world. And drag Tanner."

The two laughed and returned to their starting place.

"All right. Come ahead."

Temple, who was not in the picture, looked at June. But he did not see in her graceful, un-self-conscious pose only a bit of atmosphere. He saw in it the expression of something as rare and beautiful as the opening of a flower—the free spirit of the wilderness before man has found and despoiled it.

She was oblivious of him and stood with her attention fixed on the action of the two principals, who were now crossing the clearing. Baillie who, despite his personal character, was a juvenile actor of exceptional talent, had caught Briscoe's idea and was acting up to his part. Ragged, gaunt-looking, weak, he staggered on, half-dragging Tanner.

June straightened up and Temple saw her face change unconsciously from curiosity to concern. The dire distress of the two seemed actually to have stirred her.

"By gad," muttered Briscoe to Paul, "the girl's got imagination. She's acting, she can't help it."

Temple nodded. Meanwhile the minor characters were playing their parts. Indians

and trappers registered surprise, then interest, then excitement. They moved towards the starving pair.

Then Temple who was still watching June, saw another look come into her face, a look of naked anguish and pity that startled him. And suddenly her emotions expressed themselves in action. Totally forgetful of Briscoe's directions, she left her place in the doorway, and with swift strides went towards the central group.

Others had already gathered about the principals, but the girl pushed her way through and went straight to Baillie. So naturally did she do it, and so surely, that in a moment she was in charge, giving directions and dominating the scene. She clung to Baillie, supporting him, and as he leaned on her, simulating weakness, she bent over him with a swift look of compassion and tenderness that to Temple was like the tearing of a veil before sacred things.

"Holy cat! The girl's great!" cried Briscoe, and then bounding forward, shouted, "Whoa!

That'll do. Now we'll 'shoot' it. And Miss Magregor, I want you to repeat exactly what you did this time—see?"

At the first sound of the director's voice, June had started with the violence of her wrench back to reality. Now drawing away from Baillie who was grinning at his success, she looked confused and embarrassed.

"Never mind about disobeying orders," Briscoe comforted her. "You got away with it, and I'll forgive you."

At one side Fleming Magregor watched his daughter's *début* in silence, his pride in her achievement wrestling with his Scotch conscience.

As June went back to her station, Temple turned away from the scene and walked down towards the river. He wanted to be alone. He felt as if his whole being were afire. That look, that moment of tenderness, had revealed to him the existence of the thing he had dreaded above all others—that June was beginning to love Baillie.

That she had betrayed the fact uncon-

sciously, was to him the surest proof of its truth; it revealed an inner state of mind which she probably did not as yet realize herself. Baillie's gradual furtive campaign had swept her unknowing beyond her depth.

And with this realization of June's love for the other, came a second: namely, that, fight and deny as he would, he loved June. Her act had been the tiny flame to set off the train long laid in his heart. His thought, that first day of their meeting, that perhaps she of all the women in the world was to awaken the great love of his life, he knew now to have been divination.

His long years of waiting had reached their inevitable culmination here, and he was as powerless to stay the sweep of forces within him, as he was to push back the flow of the river along which he walked towards camp.

And what now would be the effect upon his life of these revelations with their concomitant struggles and readjustments?

The first was to effect a swift and complete reversal of his attitude towards Baillie. He

shook himself free from the passive course he had felt obliged to maintain, and determined to master not only the man but his influence.

He felt with absolute conviction that June's infatuation for the other (he admitted its existence now) was not love, though she might think it was, and he longed to show her, by the glory of the thing that burned in his heart, the contrast between the two emotions.

But here he came face to face with his second and greater problem. He himself was not free. Yet, after long thought, frankly admitting this, he still claimed June.

"Because I made one mistake, must I pay for it all my life?" he asked himself. "Have I no right to happiness?"

His head was bent and his face lined with pain as he walked, fighting this bitterest battle. Then, because love, to those natures which ring truest, is a medium for giving, not getting, he pushed his own desires aside.

To save June! That was the first thing. After that, perhaps, the knotted problem of his own desires. It would require time, that

rescue, and it would require more: an ardent courtship which he had not the right to pay.

A gust of anger shook him. Right or not, he should pay it. The end justified the means. The hopeless pain such a course might cause him he did not reckon, for, thinking of her, his desired of the world, pain and longing became as nought. Just a little time, he pleaded, just a little time!

The trail debouched into the camp clearing, practically deserted now except for the cooks who were rattling about the big range under the cook tent in the first preparations for dinner. Acrid wood smoke from the stove-pipe stung his nostrils.

Paul walked to the edge of the bank that shelved down to the little natural cove where was the camp landing and pier, and looked across the river. The afternoon was drawing down, and the dense green of the trees on the opposite bank looked almost black. The sun and a tingling breeze were in his face.

Then, as he stood, one of two men who were working about an empty barge at the water's

edge, suddenly stood erect and shaded his eyes up-river. Then he bellowed joyously, "Boat ahoy!" and pointed.

Paul looked, and in the weltering gold of a far bend made out an inch-long black speck which familiarity had taught him was one of the great camp flatboats.

Instantly his whole world crashed about him. In the intense depth of thought and feeling the realization of his love had brought, he had forgotten it. Now the meaning of its approach came home with terrific force.

On that boat was Gertrude. By evening the whole camp would know of his marriage, and, the next day, June. Who would there be then to oppose Baillie? And who to save the girl who could not save herself? What too, of all his new-sprung hopes and dreams?

CHAPTER VII

A "CUT-BACK" TO MANHATTAN

PAUL TEMPLE watched dumbly as the boat bearing his wife drew steadily nearer. Now he could make out the helmsman by the big steering sweep in the stern, and two other men running back and forth along the gunwales, long poles balanced in their hands. Then, at two hundred yards distance, a fourth figure rose and detached itself from the high-piled cargo, and Paul saw that it was a woman.

Then whatever last faint hope had flickered in him died. Plans and dreams went out with it, and a grim resignation took their place. He shrugged. Since she had come, he would play the game. He had always played it, and he would play it now. But she should

play it too, he told himself; from now on there should be a better and a final understanding.

The boat was drawing close, and Temple turned slowly to go down and meet it. To do this it was necessary for him to circle back through a little tongue of woods before he could reach the path leading down the bank. When he emerged the scow was just warped alongside the pier, and as he watched he saw the woman leap ashore. Even at this distance her Broadway clothes were unmistakable—a travelling dress and hat of the latest cut and material, both of which seemed strangely out of place here where dress had been modified to the primitive requirement of usefulness.

The woman turned back to talk to the boatmen for a moment, and was lost to sight. Then when Paul had stepped on the pier and was quite close, she reappeared and they were face to face.

He stopped short in amazement. The woman was not Gertrude.

“My Gawd!” shouted the lady, joyfully, and ran towards him. “If it ain’t Paul

Temple! Kid, I'm that far away from home an' mother I could bawl!"

"Goldie Burke!" He could hardly speak. To find this old friend, a member of the New York Graphic Company, when he had expected Gertrude, struck him aghast. "What are you doing here!" he managed to say amid the whirl of his emotions.

"Tryin' to keep from kissin' you, old dear!" She seized his out-stretched hands effusively. "Briscoe wired for me to come an' do mother parts in some small stuff he's goin' to take, and I'm here. But Lord, I'm homesick!"

As they turned up the hill she rattled on, shaking her hat straight on her tousled yellow hair with a flirt of her head, and vigorously chewing gum.

"And were you the only passenger—the only woman to come down on the boat?" Paul asked incredulously, when he had somewhat recovered himself.

"Was I! You said it. Wasn't it just like Briscoe to make me travel out here alone with three men? What does he care for a woman's

reppitation and virtue? But I've got a gun an' I slept with it every night."

With growing joy and a sense of exultant freedom from a horrible oppression, Temple guided the voluble Goldie up the new and dismal Broadway. Gertrude had not come. He was just commencing to realize it now. The reason he did not know nor care. But it was typical, he thought, of her treatment of him, and it gave him hope that perhaps she was not coming at all.

Granting her time for preparation, today's boat was the logical one for her to have caught. The arrival of the next was problematical, as this cargo comprised the last shipment of camp supplies expected for some time.

And now the battle for June!

At the moment when Paul recognized Goldie Burke, Gertrude Temple, or Gertrude Mackay as she was called, was as far away from him in thought as she was in body. Seated at a table next the brass railing of a Broadway "tango palace," she was laughing gaily at

the rather heavy jest of the man opposite her.

She was a pretty woman of the "stagey" type which has made such heavy inroads on the younger English nobility. Beautifully dressed in the filmiest of summer gowns, and with every feminine art to aid, she looked young and blooming—almost girlish. But the close observer would have noted a look of hardness about the corners of her turquoise blue eyes, and the faintest suggestion of weariness in their mirth. Her painted lips were scarlet, her teeth small, even, and white.

"Honest, Al," she confided, "it's a treat to come here with you. Every girl on the floor is trying to catch your eye. It ain't every day they get a chance to show before the president of the Stellar Films."

Al Bergman grinned amiably and puffed at his fat black cigar. He himself was fat and black. He was conscious of the attention paid him and liked it.

"Well, it ain't I'm so rotten at pickin' 'em, is it?" he asked. "I picked you, an' you're comin' along good."

The woman twirled her highball glass between her fingers until the ice clinked against the sides.

“Do you mean that, Al?”

“Sure I mean it. I saw the second reel of ‘Which Path?’ in the projection room this morning, and you done great. If that thing goes like I think it will, you’ll be made.”

“Ah!” She dropped her eyes and the smile left her face. In its place came a look of triumph that was not joy, but almost bitterness.

“That’s what I want, Al,” she said. “*He* always was jealous of me; that’s why he wanted to keep me in a glass case all my life. But I’ll show him there’s somebody in the movies besides *him!*”

Suddenly a uniformed band in a balcony at the other end of the hall crashed into a throbbing, thumping strain, and couples rose from about the tables and commenced to crowd towards the dance floor.

It was a golden September day, but the heat was that of midsummer. The whirring elec-

tric fans merely puddled the sickly, close atmosphere without refreshing it, and the people, mostly *habitués* with a sprinkling of sightseers, looked pale and wilted. There was an air of forced gaiety and false enjoyment about the whole thing.

Gertrude and Bergman did not dance; the former watched her companion, and the latter was content to sit and feast with sleepy, half-shut eyes upon the feminine procession that swirled by him.

After the encore, when the dancers were returning to their places, he leaned forward and picked up the thread of their conversation where she had dropped it.

"I guess making good with the Stellar is better than chasing Mr. X. all over Canada, ain't it, Gertie?" he asked.

"You spilled a chinful then, Al. But I've told you before I never meant to go up there. That letter of his about a divorce kind of peeved me, so I shot the hottest one I could think of back at him. That's all. There's nothing he hates worse than to have me around

where he's working, so I wrote him I was coming. I hope it gave him a fit."

"Well, keep it down to threats, dearie." He ogled her and grinned.

"Don't you worry. I'd never go. If I was to show up there he'd probably stop my allowance before I got within shooting distance, and that would make a fine, enjoyable outing, wouldn't it?"

Bergman grunted comfortably and shifted his cigar to the other corner of his mouth.

"Well, dearie," he said, modestly, "you know you needn't ever let a little thing like that worry you. But say, what's Graphic doin' up there in the backwoods anyway?"

"Shooting a big North country feature, far as I can learn," she told him. "Goin' to wait for snow and pull a lot of realistic stuff. Say!" Her face lighted with a sudden thought, but after a brief moment she dismissed it. "That ain't such a bad idea of theirs either!" she finished indifferently.

Real interest showed for a moment on Bergman's placid face.

"It ain't, at that," he admitted. Then he leaned over and patted her hand. "But we should worry when we got a star comin' along that'll put all their eyes out, eh, Gert?"

She lowered her gaze to conceal a flicker of satisfaction. Then she flashed him a grateful look.

"Sometimes I think you're too generous, Al."

Suddenly he leaned forward, planting his elbows on the table and looking at her squarely with his black, bright little eyes.

"So do I, Gertie. Look here, how long are you going to keep this up? Ain't you got any heart? Ain't I anything to you?"

She drew back cool, smiling, self-possessed.

"I'm not a star with my own company yet, am I?" she asked sweetly.

Bergman groaned and sank back in his chair.

"I'm makin' you a star as quick as I can, ain't I?" he complained. "My God, it seems to take forever."

And then, because he was scowling, she

leaned forward and smiled and played upon him until his look of pleased proprietorship returned. In the midst of it the music blared out again, and the jaded couples rose mechanically from their tables to dance.

CHAPTER VIII

BETWEEN TWO FIRES

JUNE MAGREGOR found life bewildering. The multitudinous impressions and sensations of the last weeks overwhelmed her, and sometimes at night when undressing in her raftered bedroom, she asked herself wonderingly, like the girl in the nursery rhymes "Can this be I?"

Sophistication had begun, though she would not have called it that. She was different; there was gone a certain first evanescent glory of innocence, even as Temple had prophesied. But there was, too, an awakening, a perception of things deeper and finer than she had ever dreamed.

No longer at the mention of love would she have asked what the poet meant. She had learned of it by observing her lovers. Whether

she herself loved she could not have said, but she knew poignant gladnesses and longings and pain interspersed like sun and rain on an April day.

Jack Baillie saw to that. He made love tumultuously, his eyes flashing and his voice thrilling. By turns he was stormy and serene, humble and exalted, intense or cold as his moods dictated. He even dressed the part, his Byronic shirts with wide soft collars setting off splendidly his shapely dark head with its thick, curly hair.

He made June romantically unhappy and she liked it. He kept her in a continual ferment of uncertainty, sweeping her to the stars one night by a flight of passion, frightening her the next with a threat of suicide. Her heart changed its beat strangely when she heard his voice.

And he swayed her in still another way; he awakened her sex consciousness. Like the healthy, vital young animal she was, sleeping instincts awoke at their destined call and whispered of undreamed things.

This was Baillie's love, a love of hours alone, of "secrets," of sentimentality, and tremulousness.

Set against it was the clean, fresh-wholesomeness of Temple's, an inspired companionship that spoke love as plainly in its way as did Baillie's passion. Quietly, unobtrusively, since that day of the picture at the fort, he had assumed a larger and larger part in her life.

They talked books, read together, delved deep into the mysteries of worlds here and hereafter; the How of the stars, which we know something of, and the Why of which we know nothing.

And with him, too, though they were happy together like children, June felt that underneath his quietness lay a fierce intensity held in strong leash. It seemed to run like a mighty current beneath the dancing waves of their intercourse, sweeping her with it.

And yet it was Baillie who oftenest filled her mind and imagination; the fire, the *elan* of his love ignited a tinder of the senses that burned

very bright. But Temple, to whom passion was the crown rather than the body of love, shielded the flame from her even as she shielded her own awakening from both her lovers.

At the beginning Paul had met and settled a problem seriously involving his conscience. This was whether he could with honour pay attention to June without telling her of his marriage. Every natural instinct resented this, and yet he knew that by no other course could he hope to win in what he had set out to do. To tell her the truth would be to remove himself from the field and leave Baillie unopposed.

But he intended, of course, when the time came, if come it did, to make a clean breast of the whole affair. . . .

One still cold evening, as he and June paced up and down the fort clearing in the twilight that was growing shorter and shorter as the fall advanced, he told her of his love. The air was still and crystal clear, and the hard blue light of the sky, still tinged with a lemon-

coloured sunset, brought out with the distinctness of an etching the straight banded trunks of the birches at the edge of the forest.

His words were deep with conviction and passion.

She moved beside him, anxious, finding her burden heavy. The transition from the passionless, almost sexless girl supremely careless of love that she had been, to the woman plunged into the crucible of life by two men of a new and magic world, frightened her.

"Oh, Paul, what can I say!" she cried, "except that I—I don't love you!" She looked up at him a little fearfully, dreading a mercurial outburst of despair. But his face only went white with pain, and he looked unseeingly off above the enclosing trees. Then in a moment his jaw set and he turned to her eyes as steady and hard as flint.

"June, you're going to love me," he told her quietly. "I'm going to *make* you."

Again she felt the pull of that strong current that underran their relations, and after a moment he asked:

"Is there anyone else?"

She hesitated long, for her bewilderment and perplexity were very great, and she was alone and inexperienced.

"Oh, I don't know!" she said. He was strong, masterful, and yet there was the echo of another delicious music that he did not sound. "I don't know!"

He felt a little recompensing satisfaction. At least he had accomplished something. He had checked before she realized it, the conflagration whose first flame he had detected that day of the picture. She did not know! Then he and Baillie were on even ground.

"I don't want a final answer now," he said. "I'll wait." (How different, she thought, from Baillie's passionate claiming of her!) "I want you to *know* as I know, and you will. And when you do, time or distance, or anything that may happen, can never make any difference. But you're going to love me, June, sometime, and when that time comes, you'll find love wonderfully different from anything you have ever known."

She looked up at him again. The pain had gone from his face and now it seemed strong and rugged, glowing with an intense inner light. She had studied it often, trying to read what life had written there, but tonight it revealed much:—sensitiveness and feeling, and perhaps mystery and tragedy. Tragedy most of all?

They talked little after that except for cheerful generalities. Silences fell, silences characteristic of their intimacy, and June felt a deep and abiding peace. Temple always brought her that.

Then through the dusk there sounded a clear cadenced whistle and the girl stopped, her face quickening.

“Shall we go back now?” she asked, and he turned without a word. But the pain had come back. Temple knew that whistle. Baillie had come.

By the loom of the dwelling with its yellow, lamp-lit windows, they met him. He seized the girl's hand eagerly and then nodded curtly to Paul. The three sat down on the

edge of the low veranda and exchanged perfunctory commonplaces.

Then when Paul was about to go, the door opened and Fleming Magregor came out.

"Is Mr. Temple there?" he inquired, peering at the dim figures.

Paul rose.

"Wull ye have a pipe?" the factor invited, after responding shortly to Baillie's greeting, and waved towards the heavy chairs in a corner of the veranda.

Paul accepted gratefully. They seated themselves, the factor methodically shaving his hard plug of tobacco in silence. His contempt for Paul's fine-cut weed was monumental.

"Wad ye like to go huntin', say Thursday?" he began abruptly when the fire was bright in the briar bowl. "The deer should be driftin' back towards Skull Lake for the lily-pads the noo, and I thought ye might like to try it."

Would he like to try it? Would Bryan like to make a speech or Carnegie be interviewed?

Paul could have stood on his head for the solemn grey man. But he had no proper gun, he mourned.

“I’ve plenty. . . . I’m a bit of a sportsman, as we all have to be up here.”

They talked on, planning the details. In the midst of it Baillie and June, who had been murmuring together at the edge of the veranda, rose and strolled away in the darkness.

A mad jealousy burned all of life to ashes for Paul. But worse than that, as he watched them go, was the Fear. How little she knew! How determined Baillie was!

Paul shivered, though not with the cold. How much longer, he asked himself, must he wait for the opportunity he sought? A fierce impulse to rise and follow them, to triumph with the strength of his hands over that subtle villainy, surged through him. But he fought it down. The time was not yet, and he must bide the time. A false move and he would throw June irrevocably into Baillie’s arms.

He apprehended little that he heard of deer hunting that night.

CHAPTER IX

A TEST

IT was a wild scene. The river at this place, twenty miles below Fort McLeod, had narrowed to a swift, foam-flecked stream. The bank where the half-dozen of the Graphic party sat was low and rocky; the green forest was in the background. Two canoes loaded with camping paraphernalia were beached upstream, and two others strained and knocked in the current before them.

Over everything hung a mantle of noise, a loud monotonous roar, the senseless brawl of fast water. Down-stream the river banks closed in to form the high black walls of a gorge amid which the tossing waves of a rapid showed like white teeth. And in a patch of sunlight against one of those walls swung a thread, and at the end of it a man with a tiny

machine—Gene Perkins getting ready for the “shot.”

The group on the bank, which included Paul, June, Elsie Tanner, Baillie, and others, watched a colloquy between a man and a woman at the water's edge. The latter, garbed in Indian dress, was speaking fast and passionately and the other, with battered hat pushed back on his square head and arms akimbo, replied sharply at intervals.

Then suddenly the girl buried her face in her hands and sank down on the stones weeping. Briscoe looked at her a moment, shrugged, and turned up towards the waiting group. He came slowly and dejectedly. For the first time in his life he looked beaten.

“French has funk'd it cold,” he announced. “She says I've no right to ask her to go through that gorge in a canoe.” He made a motion with one hand. “Even a thousand-dollar bonus didn't get her. Guess we'll have to fake it at some nice little mill-race in New Jersey.” His scorn equalled his disappointment.

Silence fell on the little group. Paul, Elsie Tanner, and Baillie had also been destined to make that whirlwind trip between black walls, and French's vacillation and delay had been trying. 'For a week rain and cloudy weather had held them up, and now after an all-day trip to this location, the leading lady had finally knifed the "take."

Baillie moistened his lips and a little colour came back into his face. Elsie Tanner who, in her cheerful, unobtrusive way had faced every peril known to man without a qualm, smiled, and Paul frowned. He looked up at Briscoe and spoke soberly:

"I'm not dying to go through there"— he nodded towards the rapids—"but if we don't get that thrill, the film's a failure. We *must* get it somehow, Tom."

"Perhaps we could find a less dangerous rapid that French would go through," suggested Baillie.

"There ain't one within a hundred miles," growled Briscoe. "And what do I care for

a less dangerous rapid? I want *guts* in this picture!"

A perplexed and hopeless pause fell. Then suddenly June who had been listening, spoke:

"Perhaps I could go through, Mr. Briscoe. I'd like to try."

Everyone turned to her, staring, unbelieving. Baillie started to speak but checked himself.

"*You would?*" A look combined of dazzling joy, admiration, and amazement, lighted Briscoe's face.

"Yes, if Miss French would let me have her costume. I think it would fit me." She spoke a little eagerly now. The colour of excitement was in her cheeks.

Briscoe bounced to his feet as if he had been made of rubber.

"Great!" he cried. "Miss Magregor, you've saved us. That bonus is yours, and anything else the Graphic Company's got. By thunder, you're my star of the North!"

The girl flushed with pleasure. She was in awe of this live-wire genius, but she knew

the value of his praise. She turned from him to Baillie who was mumbling in her ear.

"Don't do it, June," he was pleading thickly, "don't take that risk. If anything happened to you——"

"It would happen to you, too, Jack." Her eyes rested on him a little surprised.

"But—are you sure you can do it?"

"No, I'm not, but I want to try. It will be wonderful sport!" She quivered with the nervous courage of the thoroughbred at the barrier. He said no more.

It was characteristic of French that though she refused to chance the white water herself, she resented June's taking her place. Her eyes snapped with jealousy as June donned her Indian costume. She had heard, as Briscoe intended her to, that phrase "star of the North."

The director was now arranging the final mechanical details, casting a glance now and then up the canyon where the sun was gradually lighting it as noon approached. At its height it would flood the gorge for half an

hour, and it was then the hazardous trip must be made.

Three cameras were to be used, one at the entrance to the rapid, a second suspended in midair half-way through, and a third at the lower end to catch the final leap of the canoes into still water. Two assistants were helping with the artillery.

The "stunt" itself was a canoe race through the rapid, this being a climactic scene in the "Wilderness Idyl," and the most difficult of the troubles Briscoe's fiendish ingenuity had devised for the long-suffering Princess Na-shi-go.

Temple and Elsie Tanner, as man and wife, were supposed to be fleeing from the mysterious vengeance that had pursued them ever since they had married and come into the Northland, and hot on their heels followed the Princess and the trapper (Baillie) who was in love with her.

At the water's edge the men were examining the canoes. They were stout, tried craft, ballasted evenly with what for the sake of the

picture represented duffle, but was really stone. They would ride steadily and yet present plenty of freeboard.

"Elsie," said Paul, as his companion calmly took her place in front of him, "I like to work with you. You're a brick. There isn't a speck of yellow in you."

The quiet young woman who was neither beautiful nor brilliant, and who probably would never be great, coloured swiftly and laughed with a sudden catch in her voice.

"I'd be all yellow if I didn't know *you* were behind me," she said, and almost revealed her long secret romance.

For a moment Paul pondered her unusual emotion. With man-like obtuseness he hoped after all she wasn't going to funk it.

June had finished dressing now and came down to the water's edge. She and Baillie took their places. Then several revolver shots from far up the gorge attracted their attention, and they turned to see Perkins's tiny white handkerchief waving.

"He's all ready up there," said Briscoe,

"and the sun's right." The canyon stood revealed in the yellow glow, a forbidding place at best with its black, wet walls. "Now, children," he added, his eye on Baillie, "if any of you don't want to go through with this, say so now. Once you go in there's no stopping till you come out. If you turn over in the middle, good-bye. I've got men waiting at the other end to take care of you, but they'll be no good in the rapid."

"Let's get it over," growled Temple, and switched his canoe around. The rest remained silent.

"All right. Go ahead. But Baillie, you let Temple get through before you start." The preliminary stages of the race leading up to the plunge into the white water would be filmed later if the big "stunt" was successful. The two craft struggled a short distance upstream and turned. Paul glanced anxiously at Baillie. Was June facing two dangers in this daring trip?

"Ready, Elsie?" They were kneeling, firm-set.

"Yes."

"Then, go!"

The two paddles dug the water and the canoe leaped forward.

Swiftly they passed the camera that was taking the "approach," and as swiftly the spot where Briscoe stood, his face drawn and tense. Then the rocky banks commenced to rise and close in, there was an icy breath of dank air, and the clamour of the many-tongued water rose louder and louder. Then before them a wave, the grandfather of all waves, rose up and shook its hoary head and shouted. The next instant it had mysteriously disappeared beneath them, and chaos had begun.

The bow slewed sidewise as a wave slapped it and the crest shot into the boat. Paul recovered and swung her back. Already he was drenched and half-blinded with spray. Then, the first shock past, the exhilaration of the struggle thrilled him. His brain cleared and he felt himself possessed by an exultant, savage joy of power—the power of man conquering blind, destructive nature.

Now the clamour was deafening and the water one mass of leaping white interspersed with smooth black patches. Then, suddenly, something suspended in the air rushed towards the canoe, loomed large, seemed about to strike it, and flashed by. It was Perkins filming the wild flight.

At last when Paul had commenced to feel that the world was all noise and motion and drenching icy water, there was a final toss and leap, and they shot out upon a wide, green pool that was strangely still. The third camera, stationed on a jutting rock, caught them as they did so, and the waiting men from the camp cheered.

The impetus of their flight sent them across to the rocky edge of the pool and, as Paul steadied the canoe with his hand, he looked back. The others were not in sight, apparently had not yet started.

Elsie Tanner climbed out and then sat down suddenly, trembling with the weakness of reaction. Paul, when he landed, also found himself affected, and to recover walked slowly

around the pool to the point where the camera man stood.

“Here they come!”

Far up the wild perspective, now glimpsed, now smothered from sight, tossing like a chip, came the canoe. Sherman at Temple's side was grinding steadily.

Paul's heart beat fast. What of Baillie? Would he come through? Would he crack?

On they rushed, swerving and leaping in a boil of foam. They swept past Perkins; they shaved a jagged tooth of rock, and were in the last descent. Then, in the final riffle, at the lip of the pool, the canoe slewed dangerously. Temple shouted an impotent warning, Baillie tried to recover, failed, and the next instant they had struck a submerged boulder. There was a sharp *crack* as the canoe broke in two, and the paddlers were flung bodily down into the pool, the *debris* rushing after them. Both disappeared.

It had all happened so swiftly, just on the verge of success, that Temple stood for a moment stunned and paralysed. Sherman,

cursing in a monotone, methodically turned his camera and continued to grind.

Then as Paul jerked himself to life, Baillie appeared above the surface. He gasped for breath and flung the water from his eyes. Then recollection seemed to come to him, and he looked about as if searching for June. Not seeing her, he hesitated, and then with a strange moaning cry of terror, struck out madly for shore.

As Temple leaped he saw June reappear and, as he swam for her, he suddenly realized the danger of that still pool. All the force of the tumbling water expended itself in swirling, powerful currents that sucked down everything that floated.

Five yards from the struggling girl she disappeared again, and gulping a mouthful of fresh air Paul dove after her. Already he ached in every limb from the icy water, and his soaked clothing seemed leaden.

Then opening his eyes in that sinister green light, he saw her dimly and clutched her as she went by. Luckily he caught her by the

collar of her deerskin dress, and had a little advantage in the desperate fight up to the blessed air.

The struggle became a nightmare horror, a confused chaos of roaring noises and of vast weights that sought to crush him. Then at last he felt someone clutch him from above, and heard a man's voice say indistinctly:

"Good for him, he's got her. Now haul 'em aboard."

He felt the warm sun on his face, and releasing his bursting lungs drank deep of the sweet, life-giving air.

Five minutes later, somewhat recovered, he helped the two men who had put out in the canoe to lift June ashore. She had been unconscious when rescued, but already was commencing to gasp and moan as her senses returned.

They laid her on the rocks, and while Paul tried to revive her the others ran for blankets. At Paul's command those who had crowded around stood back to give the girl air.

Then, gradually, June's breath came more

easily, her eyelids fluttered and at last opened. For a moment she stared up blankly into the face of the man above her.

"Thank God!" said Paul, with fervent tenderness.

The voice seemed to rouse her, and with clearer and clearer vision she stared up at him, taking in one by one his wet face, matted hair, and dripping clothes.

"Jack . . ." she said faintly, and stopped all at once. Then in a voice of wonder: "*You—Paul—!* I saw you on the bank. I—" There was a longer pause as the truth filtered into her stunned brain. "Then it was *you* who saved me. . . . Where is *he?*"

"Safe. And now you mustn't talk any more. Just rest."

CHAPTER X

BAILLIE PLAYS HIS TRUMPS

WHEN Paul awoke that dawn under the vigorous shaking of the cook, it was to a feeling of delicious anticipation. Pushing back the tent-flap, he saw the grey light and felt the chill wind that precedes sunup of an early autumn day. The pines about the camp clearing were wreathed in a bluish mist, and the river was obscured, but already the curtains of haze were stirring.

He dressed for once without his plunge in the rock-lined pool the men had constructed, for this was the day of the deer hunt and he must be at the fort at half-past five. After the strenuous time in the rapid (of which Fleming Magregor was still ignorant) Briscoe had given the principals a few days' rest and

was filling in the time with some short stuff he had on hand.

At the cook tent Paul shocked himself into consciousness with two cups of scalding coffee, and a light collation consisting of ham and eggs, bread and butter, and pie. Then he went down to the pier. On the way he passed through the sleeping camp. The log shacks, ten altogether, were completed now, and occupied by some of the female contingent. The weather had sharpened warningly as fall advanced, and the nights were very cold. Only the hardier women braved them under canvas, though all of the men were still in the open.

At Baillie's tent he heard sounds which indicated the other's complete oblivion to the world. But had he looked behind him as he went down the hill to the river he would have noticed a strange thing. The snoring suddenly ceased, the tent-flap was pushed back furtively, and Baillie's bright eyes watched his departure.

But a suspicion of such significant things

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never crossed Paul's mind. He was too happy in the anticipation of the day to come. Stepping into his canoe, he pushed off into the swift current and swept away between the blue misty banks, an adventurer in the wilderness. His blood tingled with the elixir of the air, and putting aside all that life had been to him, and all that it still might bring, he felt the primitive, animal joy of mere being surge through him. Today was his and he should take it and be happy.

In token whereof he startled the birds in the trees by bursting into a melodious bellow of song.

"In smiling Bacchus' joys I'll roll,
Deny no pleasure to my soul,
Let Bacchus' health round briskly move,
For Bacchus is the friend to love.
And he who will this health deny,
Down among the dead men let him lie!"

As he neared the fort he was suddenly surprised to see June awaiting him on the beach. She listened to his musical efforts judiciously.

"There won't be much use going hunting if

you keep that up," she told him as he landed. "Everything old enough to walk will be in Alberta."

He waved her aspersion lightly aside.

"You should hear me sing while I accompany myself on the mouth-organ. You're not going with us!"

"Oh, no,"—she spoke a little hastily, he thought—"I'm just up to see you off."

"I feel properly honoured."

She laughed a little constrainedly and turned up the bluff.

Paul found the factor waiting for him in front of the fort, granulating plug tobacco with a clasp knife, and cocking an eye at the weather. He welcomed his guest dryly and handed him his rifle. In Magregor's handling of the weapon, and his abstracted manner and speech Paul recognized the characteristics of the devotee, the zealot of the chase, a direct descendant of Nimrod the mighty hunter.

"We'll strike eastward in the direction of Skull Lake," said the factor, presently, and swinging up the light pack he started at once.

From the edge of the clearing Paul waved June good-bye. She replied, but his half-presentiment of other things afoot, of which he knew nothing, increased.

Once the hunters had gone, June turned quickly back to the fort and went inside. An hour later she reappeared laden with a variety of utensils and packages, and went down to the beach at the river. By this time the brisk northwest wind had licked up the mists and the sun shone brightly.

Shortly after seven a red spot appeared on the river up-stream and grew rapidly larger. It developed into a canoe paddled by a man, and presently Jack Baillie grounded the craft at her feet, and leaped out on the sand.

He impulsively seized both her hands in his.

"Have they gone?" he asked.

"Yes, an hour ago."

"Great! And now for our wonderful day together!" He laughed gaily, throwing back his head, his eyes sparkling.

She wished to release her hands which he

still held, and employed some of her newly acquired *aplomb*.

"Jack, do help with the duffle. I was going to wait for you to carry it down the bluff, but——"

"Well, you poor little snow-bird!"—he sprang towards the offending provisions—"You shan't do another thing today. You shall sit on a cushion and sew a fine seam——"

"And help Mr. Baillie to paddle the stream," she finished for him archly, and he gave a whoop of appreciation.

At the canoe she noticed that there was already considerable stuff aboard.

"Did you bring things, too?" she asked, puzzled. "We can't begin to use all this in one day. Don't you remember I said you needn't bring anything?"

He laughed easily, and swept his mane of dark hair back with one hand.

"Yes, June, dear, but you know how it is. I thought perhaps there mightn't be enough, and then—perhaps I've got a surprise—you don't know!"

"Oh, um! A surprise? What is it?"

They talked surprises until the canoe was ready. Then, taking their places in bow and stern, they pushed off down-stream.

And all at once the similarity of their positions to those of the disastrous day at the rapid, struck them both, and the sudden chill of unexplained things crept between them.

Baillie felt it at once, and talked on with almost desperate gaiety. In their single meeting since the catastrophe he had continually sensed June's unanswered question; realized that he had lost ground with her. His excuse for his failure (loudly proclaimed from the moment the Graphics had started back to camp after the accident) was that the wrecked canoe had struck him on the head and dazed him in the final plunge.

But this received little credit at camp. For one thing he never offered to show the mark of the injury. He faced a courteous and careful, but none the less absolute, doubt.

He and June had spoken of the affair but

once, and then Baillie had pleaded his case with a sincerity born of strenuous self-conviction. He had convinced himself that he was helpless at the time, and he did his best to convince her. But he had felt when he finished, just as he felt now, that her attitude towards him had lost some of its responsiveness. It was detached, withdrawn, as if she were sitting in judgment.

Appreciating this, Baillie's eyes flashed with sudden anger and his cruel mouth set into a line of determination. Today he would counteract this failure; he would sweep her off her feet. He had planned this expedition the night he had heard Fleming Magregor invite Temple to go deer-hunting, and he was going to make the most of it.

They left the fort behind them and rounded a magnificent curve of the steel-blue river. The breeze was cool, but the warmth of the sun tempered it and made the sparkling air like wine. June loved the touch of the wind in her face, and presently took off her jaunty little knockabout hat with its red grosbeak's

feather, and thrust it into the narrow bow of the canoe before her.

And as the green and yellow banks glided by, she tried occasionally to reply in kind to Baillie's banter. But without spontaneity. Her thoughts and feelings upon this crisis in their relationship were too earnest; her remembrance of the occurrence too vivid.

Her point of view was characteristic. It was incomprehensible to her that he could have funked that rescue, for with his impetuous, passionate love-making, he had come to embody her girlish dream of a romantic lover. According to the world-old formula her knight's virtues must be noble; his vices splendidly melancholy and mysterious. He may even have been wicked (how eagerly she would forgive the penitent!)—dashing, debonair, reckless, temperamental, tender! All these. But a coward! Never!

And most damning of all was the fact that Jack had excused himself. In her ideal of him there was no place for excuse. He accomplished, or, if he failed, his own death was his

one and unanswerable defence. . . . During these days she had pondered long and deeply, and try as she might to excuse him to herself, somehow she could not.

They paddled easily down-stream, sweeping along almost without effort. Occasionally a banded and crested kingfisher would drop like a plummet into the shallows, or a fish-hawk flap heavily along before them. Crows scolded invisibly in the forest, and once there was a great crashing of underbrush that June said was the frightened progress of deer or moose.

Five miles below the fort they came at last to two islands, One was of good size, some quarter of a mile long: the other, lower down, was smaller, circular in shape, and thickly wooded. With its outcroppings of grey rock it looked like an impregnable fortress.

June turned the prow of the canoe toward the larger, but Baillie veered it away.

"I thought we were going to Mink Island," the girl said, turning in surprise.

He laughed.

"Oh, I like the little one so much better. You told me the other day it hadn't any name" (they had passed these islands on their way to the "take" at the canyon), "so I thought we'd go there and seize it for ourselves and name it."

"Oh, that *will* be fun!" She fell into his mood. "What shall we call it?"

"Our Island. Do you like that?"

"Oh, yes! How do you think of such nice things?"

They approached the tufted rock cautiously for it showed no beach. The white birches, their feet embedded in moss, grew to the very water's edge, and it was by catching hold of one of these that they finally landed.

Then they worked together unloading the canoe, laughing with the zest of adventure.

"We're explorers," she said, "and we've come down this river for the first time. No one but the Indians have ever been here before. Oh, I wish it were true. I've always so wanted to be an explorer."

"So do I wish it were true," he replied,

with a different intonation, "just we alone, and no one else—forever!"

When the duffle was unloaded Baillie tied the painter of the canoe to a tree trunk, and they "portaged their supplies inland," as June's fancy described it. "Inland" on their six-acre domain proved to be a little natural clearing which both greeted with shouts of delight. Immediately they made camp.

Then as the hours flew they fished from the rocks in sublime disregard of risk, the tackle for this being Baillie's surprise. And after that came the divine hour of razor-keen appetite, the incense of cooking things, and the merry meal. . . .

When they had finished eating a more subdued mood came upon them. June sat leaning against a tree, and Baillie reclined beside her resting on one elbow.

"If it were only true," he said, softly, "that we were here together, just you and I, to stay away from the world as long as we wanted. What a place for a honeymoon!"

She could not meet his ardent gaze, and her

eyes dropped. His hand went out and took hers, and this time she did not draw it away. And while he held it he talked on, telling her of his love, and all the while watching her closely for signs of returning subjection to him.

And she—because that day together had been so perfect, their companionship fraught with such delightful untrammelled joy—she felt again his strongest appeal, an appeal that at once lulled her feelings and stimulated her emotions. So perfectly did he fulfil in every regard what her imagination demanded of him, that she forgot the one stigma he still bore.

Wearied like children who have played long, they sat there while the hours of the sunlit afternoon drifted away. And stronger and stronger in the man grew the conviction that he had triumphed at last. She seemed wholly beneath his spell. And this was what he had waited for.

At last with a little shock, she noted the

lengthening shadows and obliqueness of the sun's rays as they slanted through the pine branches, and roused herself. . . .

"Goodness, I had no idea it was so late!" she said, astonished. "I suppose we must start back now. It's a long paddle upstream."

The man glanced at her swiftly and a look of cunning resolution hardened his face. Then with a sudden laugh he sprang to his feet.

"Then you must sit here," he commanded, "and let me carry the things down to the canoe. The paddle up will be enough, without your doing any of this."

Ordinarily she would have laughed him to scorn, but now she relaxed, finding a sweet thrill in obedience.

"You see," she said, lazily, "we had too much. You shouldn't have brought anything."

"You're right," he admitted. He gathered an armful of supplies and started briskly towards the landing place leaving her sitting

against the tree. Half-way to the river he glanced swiftly around and suddenly dropped his burden in a nearby thicket. "We'll need you yet," he muttered as he hurried on.

He found the red canoe tied to the tree as he had left it, and with another furtive look behind him, commenced to work swiftly at the knot. But the rope had been dragging in the water that morning and now the constant tugging of the current had drawn it hard and tight.

Desperately he worked, cursing under his breath, but before he could loosen it he heard a stirring in the brush in the direction of the camp, and the next moment, June's clear, happy voice:

"I've disobeyed you, Jack! I just couldn't sit there and do nothing, so I'm bringing things too."

With an oath he stopped, and for the fraction of a second stood stock still. This was the critical instant. She was not yet in sight, so, with a swift movement he whipped out his knife, cut the straining painter, and

giving the canoe a strong shove, saw it veer into the current. The trees, he knew, would screen its passage from her.

Then he cut the painter that still remained about the tree and threw it into a thicket. The next instant he had sprung back along the trail to intercept her. And as he did so he thought with grim satisfaction of the deep, flowing water that hemmed the island in.

Night would come soon and there was no way of escape.

CHAPTER XI

THE RECKONING

WHEN after several hours' hunting Paul Temple and Fleming Magregor had failed to find as much as a week-old deer-track in the wilderness, the factor could not conceal his disappointment.

"'Tis na hospeetable, this," he complained as the two rested by the sedge-bordered shore of Skull Lake. "At the least ye might have a shot."

But the "beasties" were apparently "fey" that day, and when noon arrived the hunters had found no game. After boiling tea and eating, the Scot suggested a change of plan in their campaign. He led the way across country half a mile to a plainly marked trail.

"This will take ye to a ford at the river," he said. "You follow it slowly and I'll circle

north and try to drive something across the trail. If ye get nothing, come out at the ford at half-past four and I'll join ye there. Then we can go home up the river trail together. But"— and his steel-grey eyes twinkled—"if I strike a fresh track—" He paused. "I'm only human, ye ken."

Paul laughed out.

"I understand perfectly," he said. "If you find anything, go to it."

The other looked his gratitude.

"That I will. If I don't come at half-past four then, you start on up. I'll follow in when I can."

With this understanding they separated, and Paul took his leisurely way to the river. He arrived there shortly before the designated time, having neither seen any sign of game nor heard a distant shot. He waited until five o'clock and then concluding that the factor had found his fresh track started homeward.

By this time there was only an hour of daylight left. The sun hung cool and yellow

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above the trees on the opposite bank, and with its descent the evening chill grew noticeable. Temple walked briskly.

After travelling a mile, the trail left the water and cut across a neck of land made by a loop in the river's course. Paul had traversed this and had come out on the bank again when, through the brush at the water's edge, he caught a flash of some red object. Parting the bushes he saw a canoe stranded against the sand bank which the piled-up silt of the river had formed here at the bend.

Surprised, he went towards it, and his astonishment increased when he recognized by the lettering on the bow that it was the familiar red canoe from the Graphic camp. He looked about him, wondering if anyone could have landed here, but rejected this thought when a search up and down the little beach revealed no tracks but his own. Moreover, there was no evidence that an attempt had been made to beach the craft. It lay grounded broadside on, bumping gently with the ripples.

Returning to the canoe he found the paddles laid along the bottom in the usual position of disuse, and thought for a moment that the craft might have drifted down from the Graphic camp. Then a flash of colour in the bow caught his eye, and he saw the felt hat with its feather which June had discarded. Recognizing this, he divined at once who had been using the boat. None of the Graphics except himself and Baillie had ever taken June on the river.

This much established, a sudden fear took possession of him. Could some accident have happened? But again reason told him no. The fact of the orderliness of the paddles, and that there was no water in the boat or any other sign of mishap, made the eventuality improbable.

How then had it come here? Through carelessness when the others left it? This was hardly credible either, since Baillie knew enough to drag a canoe well out of the reach of the current when landing, and June would have seen to this detail instinctively.

For many minutes Temple stood pondering. The very elusiveness of an explanation made a mystery. Then there flashed into his mind the recollection of his feelings that morning when starting on the hunt. He divined now that it was not only to speed her father and himself that June had been up so early. The touch of constraint in her attitude had indicated this.

He surmised that it was Baillie she had been waiting for and that they had planned some expedition together on what was also his holiday. Paul's lips closed tight at the thought. Even after the revelation at the gorge and the deep gratitude she had expressed to him, was Baillie still so highly in her favour? Couldn't she see, didn't she know yet, the sort of creature he was?

He shook off his half-angry thoughts and faced the problem before him. How had the canoe come here, and what should he do with it? He settled the latter question by preparing to paddle the craft back, at least to the fort. As he was about to get in, he noticed the

painter dragging in the water and walked forward to take it up.

The rope ran through his hand quickly and its shortness attracted his attention. Examining it, he saw at once that it had been cut, and the strangeness of the fact made him pause. The means of the canoe's having come here was plain now, but the reason behind it needed explanation. Why had it been deliberately cut loose? Where? When?

The uneasiness that had been gathering in him became distrust and then suspicion. With both the factor and himself absent, had Baillie sought to accomplish some end?

Without an instant's further delay Temple knelt in the middle of the canoe and pushed off. He knew that by keeping in the shallows along shore he could make fair progress, and at the same time look and listen for some sign of those he sought. But the magnitude of the task appalled him.

The vast wilderness stretching away on every side seemed to have leagued its fastnesses against him. He had only one clue—

that June and Baillie had started on the river. His chance was that they were still somewhere near it.

As he worked his way up-stream the sun sank behind the western bluffs and the swift northern twilight closed down. A chill breath rose from the water, and the forest at his left roared deeply as the gusts of rising wind rushed through it. Temple glanced at the sky. It was clear. He would have the benefit of starlight, and later, he knew, a moon.

But though he searched the river bank closely for some signs of a camp or landing place, and listened for sounds of human proximity, he saw and heard nothing. That Baillie and June might have landed on the opposite shore he did not consider probable, as the navigable channel below Mink Island ran to the east side, and the western arm was composed of shallow, stony rapids. Had the canoe drifted down through these it must have overturned.

It was long after six and quite dark when Paul became aware of the black bulk of the

round, wooded island which lay down-stream from Mink. The loom of it was ahead and to the right, and he bent to his work. He had been making good progress, but now he knew the faster current in the seventy-five yard channel would retard him.

Gradually the island came towards him, he gained it; he drew abreast. The brawl of the rapids on the opposite side was so loud in the night air that he gave up any attempt to hear a human voice.

Then, just as he was about to leave the island behind, the tail of his eye caught a red glow of light from it. The next instant this had disappeared as he surged ahead.

He stopped paddling and drifted back. There it was again, the uneven flicker of a fire. Temple's jaws set. If the two he sought were there, Baillie's plan was obvious. He would try to use the fact of having stayed a night in the open together as a bludgeon to force June into marriage with him. Feeling that he had lost ground after the episode at the rapid, he

had taken this means to defeat Temple, unless——

Paul went suddenly hot and cold by turns. If he knew his man, Baillie didn't want that. Men in honest search of a priest don't cut canoe painters on islands from which there is no escape. Not for a moment in the past had Temple been able to credit Baillie with honourable intentions, and he saw no reason to do so now.

With a dig of his paddle he swung the canoe around and obliquely across the current.

Then as he drew near the island, above the noise of the water he heard human voices, mingled but indistinguishable. Still closer in, they came again, and his heart leaped as he recognized that one was a woman's. The next moment he forced his craft into the overhanging growth along the rocks, and panting from his exertions, listened.

Again the woman's voice rang out—this time clear and unmistakable, high-pitched with a note of terror that made him half rise from his knees.

"Jack! Please! You're spoiling everything! Oh, let me go! You frighten me! You never acted like this before."

It was June; frightened, bewildered, defenceless! With an incoherent sound Temple leaped ashore, and tied the canoe to a tree by its shortened painter. Then, carefully, because it was pitch dark in the undergrowth, and because Baillie must not know of his coming, he commenced crawling on his hands and knees towards the sound.

He knew now that the girl must be discovering the real Baillie at last—that she had been no party to this contretemps. The fear in her voice told him that. The outcroppings of Baillie's true character in this unconventional situation were revealing him. Aware that circumstances often forced the people of the north into unavoidably delicate situations, Temple divined that June's acceptance of this one had been frank and innocent, disturbed only by the thought of her father's anxiety. She had expected, of course, the same chivalrous and honourable treatment that were

accorded her on many a winter journey alone with Indian or trapper; a fact which alone showed how wrongly she had guessed at Baillie's true nature, and how she had accepted his self-gilding as gold.

Temple, dripping with perspiration, struggled on through the undergrowth, his hands and clothes torn, and his face scratched. The earth was cold and had a dank, water-soaked smell. Nearer and nearer he drew to the murmur of voices.

Then, suddenly, parting the bushes, he saw the clearing. The fire was not large, but it sufficed to reveal the two figures standing facing each other in silhouette, the utensils and supplies on the ground, and the sombre encircling trees.

What the two had been saying Paul did not know, but now he heard Baillie's voice, half-indistinguishable, as it poured out passionate words in a murmur of tenderness. He stepped towards June, but she shrank back. Then, as if goaded, the man seemed to lose all control, and springing towards her caught her in a fierce embrace.

Then Temple saw red. As he leaped from his cover a low, guttural snarl purred in his throat, and his long, powerful fingers curved prehensilely. But for the convention of dress he had been flung back a hundred thousand years. It was a Stone Age scene of savage love and hate in the primeval wilderness.

Upon the struggling pair before they knew it, he wrenched back one of Baillie's arms, at the same time seizing him by the throat. Then with a great thrust he hurled him reeling back among the shadows.

June, after one cry of terror, recognized Paul and called his name. Then, in the grip of reaction, she broke into hysterical weeping. But he did not hear her. Crouched, walking on the balls of his feet, his hands half-stretched before him, he waited for Baillie.

The other came, his face a white flame of fury. He, too, had recognized his assailant, and the thought that his rival, who had shamed him once before, should have found his way here and interfered as he had promised to do long since, lashed him almost to mad-

ness. With contorted faces and narrowed eyes they circled slowly, silently, their breathing hoarse above the merry chatter of the little rapid. They faced each other almost of a size and weight, and hardened by weeks in the north. Suddenly Baillie leaped, and they had closed. Baillie's hands found Temple's head, and his bent thumbs felt for the eyes in the old gouger's hold. Temple, blinded, hooked a lucky right with all his strength close behind the other's ear, and the torturing grip relaxed an instant. Temple broke the hands apart and got away.

June, her hands clasped to her breast, watched, silent, wide-eyed, white-faced.

Shaking his head as if to clear it from the fog of Temple's blow, Baillie leaped in again, fainting for the head. The next instant he had Temple by the waist and had thrown him crashing to the ground; and then with a savage snarl he leaped for him, his feet drawn up for the deadly lumber-jack's kick. But Temple rolled over and over, and the other missed. On his feet again with a spring, Temple met

Baillie coming in, and the circling commenced once more.

They were panting now and their faces glistened with sweat. But Temple had learned the man and the game he had to beat, and was ready. As he manoeuvred Baillie so that he faced the fire, Paul leaped. He caught the other off his guard and, with a left to the jaw, felled him. Baillie was up in an instant, but could not get set. A cold fury of determination to punish those two foul attacks sent Temple after him, pounding, blocking parrying, but always beating him down and back. On they fought, panting hoarsely, battered, tiring.

“Oh, don't, don't! Paul! Jack!”

It was June, appalled by their savagery.

Baillie turned towards her, half-whimpering; but her great eyes were not upon him now. They were fixed on Temple with a look of awed wonder, almost timorous admiration; the look of the Cave Maiden for her victorious champion.

There was no sensational ending, no vic-

torious, supreme effort. Crashing and battering, the fight went on with Baillie weakening fast. He knew better than to beg for quarter, and Temple offered none.

At last three final blows broke through his futile guard, and he went down to stay.

"Get up!" Paul's swollen lips could scarcely mumble the words. The other did not stir, but Paul knew by his breathing he was conscious. He stirred him contemptuously with his foot.

"Any more?"

"No."

Paul turned away and went weakly towards June.

"Now tell me about it," he said.

When the moon rose that night it looked down upon a canoe in which a girl and a battered man paddled, and on the bottom of which lay another man, groaning. The man who paddled swayed in his seat, but the girl behind splashed water on him and encouraged him with cheerful, brisk words.

CHAPTER XII

TRANSITION

MOVIE work at the Graphic camp had changed, but though the "Wilderness Idyl" was delayed, and would be until snow came, the people were not idle. A series of one- and two-reel dramas, some in the scenario, and some leaping Minerva-like from the square dome of Tom Briscoe, kept all hands busy. This was the short stuff that had torn Goldie Burke from her beloved Manhattan. And at Briscoe's order Temple directed some of it.

Also as cold weather approached, a new and important activity developed about the Graphic general storehouse, a low, log building which sheltered both "prop" and commissary departments. Two long, low, iron-shod Arctic sledges, with gee-poles stuck out ahead

for guiding, were hauled forth and examined by the carpenter. Two score snow-shoes appeared and underwent repairs. Rows of fur and deerskin suits with capotes, leggings, mittens, and shoepacks were hung out to air and sent up a fearful odour of mothballs. These, the costumes in which the characters would traverse the snowy wilderness, had all been brought from New York with the company, as Briscoe had refused to risk outfitting his crowd on chance after reaching camp.

At the same time the country was being scoured for bushy-tailed huskies or malamutes to make the dog trains, and in the procuring of these dogs Fleming Magregor was of great assistance. He arranged with a young Indian trapper to come and live at the camp in order to care for and train the brutes so that they would be in condition when needed. A pen was constructed for them below the bluff on the river bank, and as they were bought they were confined there and fed into condition, it being a habit of the Indians to starve their dogs all summer.

The first storm of winter was expected at any time. Every night there was a heavy frost, and the few hardy Graphics who still braved the early morning plunge in the pool, found a thin edging of ice in their bath tub. All the women and nearly all the men had abandoned tent-life by this time, and the fires in the cabin stoves (sheet-iron affairs freighted north by flatboat) were grateful luxuries.

It was characteristic of Briscoe to realize fully the situation existing between Paul and Baillie and yet to say nothing. So long as the work went well and his people did not alter one another's beauty too much, he kept himself aloof from their difficulties. But, that he did not interfere after the fight was only due to the fact that he had plans of his own afoot which he wished to further.

With all regard for the romances of his principals, he had his own ideas regarding June and her future, and one day when the company was out under Paul's direction, he tramped down the river trail to Fort McLeod to lay

them before her. After talking for an hour with the factor, who spoke of a trip north he would probably make shortly, June appeared and Briscoe asked her to walk with him.

"What are you going to do with yourself for the rest of your life?" he asked bluntly by way of introduction.

June smiled a little doubtfully at the largeness of the question. She seemed pale, Briscoe thought, and he damned the lovers and the romantic nonsense that had changed her from the radiant girl she had been.

"Here's what I've come to say," he stated abruptly. "You've got acting talent, Miss Magregor, and looks, and nerve, and presence. When you come on the screen, audiences will know it. Best of all, you're new and different. But you're raw and untrained; you need seasoning and experience. Sign yourself to work under my direction for five years, and I'll make you the greatest motion picture actress in the world."

- The mistress of that lonely northern fur

post stared at him, unable to reply. But with a brisk gesture he went on:

“This is my gamble, but I’ve got faith in you. There are ten thousand girls in America right now who would sell their souls for this chance. If you’re what I think you are, it’ll make you. Fame, money, a chance to see the world—you’ll have ’em all. But it’ll be hard work.” He paused a moment. “And as for the publicity material in you—whew!”

When they had discussed the details June was silent for a long time. Briscoe had detected a change in her, but he had not fathomed its depth, and despite his half-angry astonishment at her lack of enthusiasm she could not tell him.

She could not tell him that two weeks ago she would have jumped at the offer and considered herself the luckiest girl in the world; nor could she tell him what had taken place in that fortnight. She herself scarcely realized. She only knew that she had been seared by life, and that the glories of the greater world he offered were turned to ashes and

tinsel. They left her cold and unstirred. Bruised and hurt, she clung now very close to her father and the simple, familiar things.

But she did not refuse him. Profoundly grateful, she told him she would consider the offer from every point of view, and give him her answer before the company returned to New York.

Though Briscoe ignored the rivalry between Baillie and Temple, the company was not so considerate, and from the night of the fight the camp buzzed with gossip. Difficulties between principals are more or less open secrets, but the climax to this one had come like a thunderclap.

"They say," remarked Goldie Burke, "that living in these here wildernesses full of animals makes men go back till they're brutes themselves. Well, mebbe, but you got to show me. I like my little ol' Gotham, but if there's any bigger brutes than pads Times Square, day an' night, I haven't seen 'em." Goldie, who insisted on wearing her New York apparel in

the face of the derision of the entire camp, cracked her chewing gum loudly. "An' yet I'm that lonesome, if anybody made a noise like a taxicab I'd run away like a meter."

Though aware of the cloud of gossip through which he moved, Paul cheerfully ignored it. After the fight, he found absorption and relief in the new work of direction Briscoe had given him, and refrained from going to see June until the first *furore* should have subsided. Baillie, he was certain, after one look at the other's features, would not go for some time.

Then one rainy morning about a week after the trouble, when the poor light made it impossible to work, Paul paddled down to McLeod. He arrived in the midst of preparations for the factor's journey.

"One of the Commissioners from Montreal has arrived at Moose Factory on an inspection trip through the district, and father has to report to him there," June explained. Then she pointed to a tall, lithe young Indian. "That's Jim Albert," she said, "one of our men who has been at Moose all summer. He'll

go up with father and probably come back with him. They're going to chance making it before snow comes. It will be close reckoning."

"And will you stay here alone?"

"Oh, yes." She spoke matter-of-factly. "Someone must be factor and trader while father's gone. I've done it often."

Despite the confusion at the fort June invited Paul to stay to lunch. It was a hurried meal, punctuated by the factor's orders and the coming and going of his men. Immediately afterwards Magregor and Jim Albert started north down the Onipee by canoe, and when they had gone, June with a sigh of relief led the way back into the house to the low, heavily beamed living room where a log-fire crackled in the enormous fireplace.

As he sank into one of the massive, home-made chairs and looked at the girl, Temple felt, as Briscoe had done, the change that had taken place in her since their last dramatic meeting. She seemed graver, more thoughtful, more mature.

"Why haven't you come to see me before?" she suddenly asked, looking at him with level, dark eyes. "I have needed you."

"Needed me?" Her direct piercing through superficialities to the deeper, intimate thing caught him a little unprepared. It was confirmation of the change he had noted in her; it marked the difference in their relationship.

"Yes," she replied half-musingly, "it's strange, isn't it, but I always seem to need you, and you always seem to come when I need you most. You see I'm trying to tell you how grateful I am for—the other night."

"Oh, please—it was nothing," he deprecated. "I just happened to find the canoe and——"

"But you came—just as you came the first time at the rapid. And you were splendid." Her voice thrilled with admiration, and for an instant there shone in her eyes the same look, almost of pride, with which she had watched his conquering of Baillie.

"You must know"—his voice was low and vibrant with feeling—"that I would al-

ways come when you needed me, if it were half around the world." His pulses were beating fast and he found it difficult to breathe. A swift, new wonder was taking possession of him. Never had they talked like this before.

Her elbow was on her knee and her chin in her hand as she stared into the leaping flames.

"I believe you," she said in the same half-musing tone as if she were just becoming aware of the fact. "You have never failed me yet. That's the wonderful thing about you, Paul. Whatever has happened, you haven't failed me. Sometimes I have felt, oh, so alone and helpless—I can't ask father some things, you know,—and I've thought, 'Oh, if I could only ask Paul! He would tell me what to do.' "

"You trust and believe in me as much as that!" He, too, was staring into the fire. He dared not meet her eyes. Upon his senses was stealing a delicious consciousness of her nearness, and over and over, he asked himself wonderingly: "What has happened to make her speak to me like this?"

"Yes," she answered his question. "Some-

times I think you're the only person or thing in the world I do believe in." She paused a moment. "I've been so in the dark lately. I just couldn't see light anywhere. That's why I've needed you—to show it to me. But when you didn't come I've thought of you, strong and true and honest, and I've felt that, after all, there must be good in the world."

He sat silent a moment, fighting to keep his head and see things clearly. All that she had been passing through he could not fully comprehend, but he realized that she had turned to him for comfort instinctively, like a child. And yet she was a child no longer. Her look, her manner, her voice, all these revealed the greatness of the change the week had wrought in her. It was a woman who talked with him today. She had told him frankly that he was her only firm anchor in the first storm of her life. Oh, to keep her faith in him!

"There *is* good in the world," he replied, his voice deep with conviction. "I *know* it. If

one plays the game straight, and has faith, things *must* come right in the end."

She looked at him with a little spark of the earlier admiration in her eyes. "It's what I thought you'd say. And it's what you'd do—play the game straight. You always have."

The words of unquestioning belief in him brought him up sharply to face a relentless question. *Had* he played the game straight, knowing with every conscious breath that he was not free? He pondered the point deeply, as he had done over and over in the past. And today again, as always before, his conviction was in the affirmative. To fight Baillie for June he had done rightly.

But now?

Temple groaned inwardly. What did this sudden change in June, her sudden need of him imply? Certainly complete trust and dependence, if not the dawning of love itself. And that could mean but one thing: that the Baillie myth had been exploded and the idol lay crumbled at her feet.

And Temple faced this inexorable situation:

The thing for which he had worked was done; his mission accomplished. Then in not telling her now all the truth about himself he would be a cad; he would be betraying her faith in him.

In the grip of a temptation stronger than any he had ever known, he suddenly left his chair and walked to the window. His thin, sensitive face seemed suddenly gaunt, almost pinched, but from head to foot he was aflame with passion, with the clamour of long-denied yearning both of the soul and the senses.

With Baillie disposed of what was to prevent his claiming June? Experience of life told him that her instincts had pointed her at last towards him. She did not realize it yet, else she could not have talked to him as she had just done, but he sensed that with the slightest touch the scales would swing in his favour.

Could he give that touch? To retell her his love, but not his past, to see the dawn of answering passion rise in her eyes, to claim that swift, ecstatic moment of realization and surrender; to live like two innocent children

in their bliss for a little while—this was what he asked of life.

It seemed to him now that his whole existence had been ripening towards this consummation; he was convinced that a Plan stronger than his own will had sent him north at this time to meet June and to love her. Instincts so subtle as to be unnameable whispered that it was she for whom he had been searching unconsciously all these years; she seemed utterly to fulfil and complete his personality.

Clean, virile, honourable, he had served five long years, and now must he risk his reward by telling her of his hateful tie, and all the wretched story of that sordid past? How much that risk was, he realized fully, knowing June. Direct as a beam of sunlight, pure as one of her own streams, could she look upon his life—even his deceit to save her—with anything but repugnance?

So imperious was her unconscious call to him, so eager his response, that his battle changed its ground. It became a question less whether he should tell of his earlier mar-

riage, than whether he could get from that room without pouring out his love and sweeping her with him on an irresistible tide.

The walls and ceiling of the place seemed to be pressing in and down upon him; he felt as if he were suffocating. Somehow, on some pretext, he never knew what, he found excuse to leave. She followed him to the door a little puzzled and bewildered.

"You will come again and often, now that I am to be alone, won't you?" she asked from the doorway.

"Yes, yes," he promised, "I'll see you—often."

But though the days passed in a fever of work, the struggle within him went on without decision. Because he was a man and human, he could not risk the loss of her on a single cast of the die. Because he was the anchor of her faith and belief he could not bring himself to transgress her ideal of him. So, torn between the two, he waited, seeking constantly for some ray of light to pierce the gloom of his indecision.

CHAPTER XIII

BAILLIE MAKES A DISCOVERY

FOR a week there had been the alertness of expectancy at camp Graphic. The guides to whose skill and management the place owed its existence, once Briscoe had created it, stared weather-wisely into the sky and sniffed the wind.

"She's a-comin'," they avowed, "but she ain't just set yet. A day or so and——"

Then one night the sun went down in a mass of sullen, heavy black clouds, and a high northwest wind came sweeping through the forest with the bellow of a howling beast broken loose.

"She's sot," said the chief guide, "strike them last tents quick!"

"Ah, ze snow, he come, I smell her!" beamed Pierre, a vagrant lumber-jack who

chopped wood for the camp. "Today ees summer; *demain* ees wintear, by Gar!"

Supper was eaten that evening to the clicking accompaniment of hard snow particles driven against the mess-house windows, and when the party separated that night the men could scarcely force their way against the gale to their quarters.

All night the storm raged, and when morning came the Graphics looked out upon a dizzy world of swirling white in which the figures of the guides could be seen dimly as they struggled to clear a few necessary paths. Not for an instant was there a sign of abatement of the storm, and all thought of work was abandoned.

The day of idleness was grateful. The men lolled and smoked in their bunks, or worked in relays helping the shovellers in their losing fight against the drifts.

"My Gawd!" said Goldie Burke. "If I'd a known I was goin' to be let in for this, I'd a joined Peary and went to the North Pole."

"No, Goldie," replied Elsie Tanner—the women were sitting about the glowing stove

in their bunkhouse—"with your luck you'd have picked Doc Cook, and had all your trouble for nothing."

That night, isolated as they were from all the world, made intimate by the close walls of the storm, good feeling ran high. A vaudeville performance was quickly arranged; popcorn and other necessities appeared mysteriously from somewhere, and the mess house became the scene of gay hilarity: a warm, bright picture against the desolation of the raging storm outside.

Then during the second night the wind stopped as mysteriously as it had begun, and the Graphics went to breakfast next morning through a dazzling white world overarched by a blue sky. They walked between snow cliffs as high as their heads.

Briscoe, who had spent the two days of rest in his cabin finishing snow-scene and costume charts, sounded the universal note when he rose in his place at the head of the centre table and said:

"Children, we've got just so much work

ahead of us here in this snowdrift. The sooner we get it done right, the sooner we get home. So let's go to it hard and clean it up. This morning there will be a full costume rehearsal to learn sledge-driving, trail making and winter camping. The Indian tells me his dogs are ready, so we can start at once. Now on the jump everybody."

An hour later Peter, the young Ojibway, drove up Broadway with his sledge and team, bells tinkling, whip cracking, and dogs clamouring a chorus of joy. Seven huskies, sharp-eared and bushy-tailed, formed the team. In the lead was a huge, brown animal, half-wolf and half-dog. The long traces of moosehide extended from the sledge to his harness, and the other dogs were in additional harnesses attached three on each side behind him. The breast bands were adorned with little sleigh-bells.

No sooner had Peter halted his outfit than the dogs fell upon each other in one ferocious free fight. The interested Graphics fell back in dismay, but the Indian without the slightest

excitement stood back, and, with his long black whip, flicked pieces of fur and skin out of the squirming, snarling mass until the savage brutes crept whining apart. It took a quarter of an hour to untangle the harnesses.

The Graphics scarcely knew themselves. Furred, with parkas or hoods over their heads, mittened and snow-shoe shod, they looked like a party of Arctic explorers. Some of the women's costumes, particularly that of Marguerite French, were almost priceless. She appeared in a dress of otter skins sewed together with the fur turned in, and presenting to the weather a surface as soft and pliable as chamois. The dress was exquisitely embroidered with coloured beads and porcupine quills, and had at one time adorned the person of a wealthy Eskimo squaw north of the arctic circle.

Briscoe regarded the assemblage with the eye of approval.

"You *look* all right," he said dubiously, "but I don't know how many of you will go

over instead of through the first snowdrift. Take 'em for a hike, Peter, and find out."

The dark-skinned youth gathered up his whip.

"Mush on, you! Mush on!" he cried, and the lash cracked like a pistol shot. The dogs leaped against the traces, the sledge, loaded with stone for ballast, creaked as it started, and a moment later the Graphics were struggling behind it down the silent, white-carpeted forest aisle. . . .

Two days later "takes" had begun, and the second phase of the work that had brought them north was under way.

Everyone worked hard and, to the watchful eye of Briscoe, none harder apparently than Jack Baillie. At this time the juvenile was an enigma to the camp. Since the fight on the island he had seemed a different man. In direct contrast to his natural character he had retired within himself; was sullen and silent. He was smarting bitterly under defeat, both in battle and in love, and as Temple had been responsible for both, all the venom of his

unforgiving nature was directed against the other. Hadn't Temple promised, that day of their first disagreement: "When the time comes I'll make your business mine"? And hadn't he done as he had promised? Moreover, by so doing had he not cleverly cleared the way for his own suit?

This was the most maddening, the most insupportable thought of all, and Baillie, consumed with hatred and impotent rage, had sworn to have revenge.

But how? How to crush Temple even as he himself had been crushed?

His stinging pride made it imperative that he re-establish some intercourse with June. As things stood now he dared not go near her. The rôle of repentant suppliant always remained open, of course. He was clever enough to know exactly the nature and degree of his influence over the girl, but he would only use this means if every other failed. It was too humiliating. He wanted to go back sorrowful but unbroken, repentant but temperamental still. He must appear as the double victim

of his own passion and her misunderstanding, and seem really her truest adorer and most stainless cavalier.

But this could only happen with the discrediting or removal of Temple, and how to bring this about he did not see.

During those first bitter days Baillie had watched the movements of his rival with malignant hatred, expecting him to go often to the fort, in furtherance of his suit. But as time passed and Paul went but once, he commenced to speculate.

That Temple loved June, Baillie did not doubt. The fact, then, of his abandoning a clear field was incomprehensible except for two reasons: either June had refused him, or there was some thitherto unsuspected *impasse* that restrained him.

The first of these he did not credit seriously. A knowledge of Paul's relationship with June, gathered from her, told him that the other had not yet forced the matter to the final issue. The second appeared more probable. It was one of Baillie's most sneering admis-

sions that Paul was "honourable," but now the fact struck him with a sudden new meaning and force.

"If he's so honourable there must be some reason why he can't marry June," he thought.

It was the one door that might open up the avenue of revenge. He sought for it constantly, eagerly, performing his work at the camp with conscientious care, but all the time alert for some fact that would give him a clue to the thing he sought—a dropped word, a conversation of men apart, or better still, the gossip of women.

But his efforts were in vain. Then came the snow and the change to the new phase of work.

One day while rehearsing a "take" with one of the sledges, he was guiding the cumbersome vehicle by the gee-pole in front when he slipped and fell, and the steel-shod runner cut across his moccasin-clad foot. The snow yielded somewhat, and he escaped with only a badly strained ligament. But Briscoe, taking no chances of a prolonged delay in the

work, commanded him to remain in camp for two days.

Baillie obeyed. The first day he was confined to his bunk, but the second he was able to move about indoors with the aid of a cane. He tried to dissipate the tedium of confinement by reading or playing solitaire, but each in turn lost its charm. He faced long hours alone in the bunkhouse.

This building was little better than a prison. Long, with square-paned windows, and built as usual, of logs chinked with cement, it was cramped for room and badly lighted. Along each side-wall were frameworks reaching almost to the roof which contained three tiers of bunks. The windows were at each end, and in the middle of the floor two stoves gave heat. The clothes of the men hung on nails driven in every available corner, and their trunks were stowed beneath the bunk frames.

The afternoon of the second day, having exhausted every means of amusement at his command, Baillie's thoughts returned, as they

always did, to the obsession of Temple and his projected revenge.

He glanced at the bunk where Temple slept, and under it he saw his trunk. A swift, daring thought came to him. He looked again at the trunk. It was unlocked, as were practically all those in the bunkhouse, for the men changing from wet things so often, had long since ceased to lock their baggage. They trusted each other with the mutual confidence of long intimacy.

Baillie limped to the windows and looked out. No one was in sight. It was three o'clock, the hour when the camp hands laid off in preparation for the work of dinner and the evening. With a final glance, Baillie returned to Temple's bunk, knelt down on the floor gingerly, and pulled the trunk forward.

Lifting the cover he opened the tray and saw hundreds of letters, done up in bundles and bound with broad rubber bands. His eyes glistened. If there was anything in a man's past his letters would show it. But how would he ever go through this mass of correspondence?

Then there suddenly flashed into his mind the memory of his first disagreement with Temple on the day the latter had brought June to camp. That had been over a letter. Entering Temple's tent he had picked it up, opened it, and been reprimanded sharply. He recalled a momentary suspicion at the time. Had that letter contained the matter he sought?

Owing to the circumstances Baillie remembered the letter clearly. It had a lavender envelope, was addressed in bright blue ink, with a large, sprawling handwriting, and had been scented.

Here was a clue and a plain one. Turning to the trunk, he looked through the bundles of letters, pulled from their places those with lavender envelopes addressed in bright blue ink, and hurriedly ran through them. At the third he sat back with a quick catch of the breath.

"PAUL:" he read.

"No I shall not divorce you. You can't fool me for a minute with your talk about my

'happiness.' Everybody knows that French is crazy about you, and I suppose you want to get rid of me so you can have her. Well, there's nothing doing. I have suspected you would try something like this for a long while, but I won't stand for it. I am starting for your camp at once. Perhaps you will like that, you and French.

'Your wife,

"GERTRUDE."

Wife!

Baillie's eyes glittered with exultant joy. He hadn't even dared hope for this. The most he had looked for had been a suppressed scandal or evidence of a sordid relationship. But a wife to whom his rival was bound, who had killed all his hopes of release by this very letter itself—if he had prayed he couldn't have asked the high gods for more.

"I've got him, the damned swanker!" he said to himself savagely, as he thrust the letter into his pocket. "I'll fix him now. And may be this won't fix me right with June. May be not!"

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Working swiftly he rearranged the letters in the trunk tray, closed the trunk, and pushed it back into its place. Then smiling triumphantly, his thirst for revenge appeased, he hobbled to his bunk and lay down.

CHAPTER XIV

BAD NEWS

THE morning after Baillie's discovery of Gertrude's letter Tom Briscoe came to the bunkhouse while the men were dressing. He himself slept in his office, a corner of the cabin devoted to the camp management, where he kept his charts, scenarios, and notes. He was always up and at work at the first glimmer of dawn.

This morning he came to inquire after Baillie's injured foot. "Idyl" was nearing completion and had reached a point where nothing more could be done until certain of Baillie's lead scenes had been filmed.

Baillie, planning to slip away to Fort McLeod with his stolen letter when the companies had gone out on location, shook his head despondently when Briscoe inquired. Might

be able to hobble around a little, he said, but wouldn't be able to work that day.

"Mm! Serious as that?" Briscoe was concerned. "Well, take a turn up and down the bunkhouse and let's see."

Baillie limped along groaning while a hastily organized comb band added gayety to the affair. Back and forth the director marched him, observing his actions as if he were a horse for sale. For some minutes the inspection went on. Then:

"You'll do," Briscoe said, shifting his dry cigar from one corner of his mouth to the other. "Dress for work. We'll take you to and from location on the sledge, and with that you ought to be able to walk through your scenes. Borrow an ankle brace if you can get one."

Briscoe's order rearranged the work for the day, and because of this and the overcast sky Temple found himself idle after ten o'clock. He had gone out to finish a single-reel thriller he had been directing, but the light in the necessary location—a snow-filled ravine—was

so poor that Sherman, the camera man, gave up in despair. The day's "Idyl" scenes not requiring him, Paul found himself at liberty.

As he trudged back to camp on snow-shoes an intention that had long been forming in his mind hardened into resolution. He determined to go to Fort McLeod and see June. By the clear light of calm and detached reasoning, he knew now that he must tell her the truth about himself and his marriage. The conviction had come gradually but uncompromisingly. He realized that for him there must not be even a shadow's shadow of doubt or concealment, or the whole structure of his love could not stand. Moreover, he would not accept June's love under false colours. If she must send him away, ending all his hopes and dreams, let her do so at once, before she learned to care too much.

It was easy to feel all this now, freed as he was from the bewilderment of passion and the spell of her nearness, and for that reason Paul did not blame himself too much for his flight from the fort that day of their last interview.

That hour had brought the seething of the crucible which had precipitated today's courage and knowledge.

A third and less vital reason also influenced him to his decision. He knew the crisis must be met sometime, and he realized that the longer he put it off the more difficult it would be to face.

Releasing his company of minor people at camp, Paul turned down the familiar river trail. But it was not familiar now. Under its muffling robe of snow every tree, bush, and withered stalk had taken on a new identity. Spruces, pines, and tamaracks showed delicate tracery-patterns of black and white—the work, it seemed, of fairy fingers. Over all brooded an immense stillness. The forest slept stupefied beneath a vast quietude which seemed cosmic. The day was overcast, and the snow crust of the trail formed the night before had not melted, so that a blinding, grey glare radiated from the polished surface.

At his left flowed the bleak river. Leadencoloured ice, patched with snow, edged a

centre channel of black water. Eventually, the guides said, this channel would freeze also, and the Onipee become available for sledge travel, a thing considered hazardous now. As Paul walked he faced a peculiarly biting north wind which clashed and creaked the armoured tree-limbs.

Despite the unexplained cessation of his visits to June, Temple now went to see her without diffidence. He felt that between them there was an instinctive understanding of the critical state of their relationship, and that she would construe his absence as bearing upon that. She would also know, he thought, that his reappearance must predicate some decision.

But as the trail widened to enter the fort clearing, the old fear swept over Paul. How would she receive his confession? As he hoped, patiently and with sweet understanding? Or brusksly, harshly, leaving him without hope or motive in life?

The trail at this point followed the crest of the bluff, and as Paul emerged and looked

down at the river, he heard a merry jingling of bells, the excited yapping of dogs, and the gay, ringing cries of a woman. An instant later round a bend of the shore ice below the fort, swept a team of dogs at full gallop, drawing behind them a light *cariole* in which sat June.

At sight of her a great gladness rushed over him, an emotion which seemed to swell to an indescribable exaltation. The next instant, she had looked up, seen him, and waved her hand. In response he stumbled down the bluff to the river's edge and watched her swift flight.

In perfect unison, the eight huskies, matched in size and colour, sped up and down the river, swerving to right and left at her sharp commands, and causing the pendent fox-tails on her capote to stream blithely out behind. Finally, with a last curving sweep, she swung about, drove to where Paul stood, and brought up before him with a grand flourish.

"Merry Christmas, stranger!" she cried.
"How do you like my new turn-out?"

"Snow-Queen, it's immense!" he laughed, and went forward.

The dogs, regarding him with half-shut eyes, sat on their bushy tails, panting, pink tongues a-flicker. He could see now that the *cariole* was a fancy affair of polished wood, with a curved dash and luxurious upholstery, a winter toy for a very princess.

"Would you suspect my dear, dour, grey old father of planning this for me?" she laughed. "I wouldn't if I didn't know him so well. It arrived the day after the blizzard. An Indian at Loon Lake worked all summer on the sledge, and they matched the dogs at Fort Endicott. And all for me! Imagine! I've been training my steeds for two weeks, and I think they do awfully well, don't you?" She pouted. "But no, you don't. You haven't said a word about anything, and——"

He flung up both hands in comic despair at her breathless loquacity.

"That's not nice," she reproved. "As if you hadn't had a chance to speak!"

"I'm struck dumb!" he shouted, and she

gurgled with laughter. "And now that you're helpless," he went on, "permit me to say a few brief words in appreciation of what I see here before me, and to scold you for racing around regardless, on half-formed ice."

While he discoursed, he noticed the details of her dress. She was furred from head to foot in magnificent silver fox, and quite unashamed of fur trousers beneath her long coat. Her vivacious face, framed by the capote, was radiant with colour, and her dark eyes sparkled. The realization of her abounding, glorious vitality came home to him afresh, as did the fact of her complete harmony with the environment. Just as when he had met her first she seemed to embody the spirit of the green, wild places, so now she symbolized the soul of the frozen wilderness.

"Oh, pooh!" she said naughtily, as he lectured her, and leaping out of the *cariole* seized his arm. "Just for that, you've got to be ridden yourself!"

"Not alone with those grinning brutes,"

he declared. "They're slaving now at the thought of my succulence."

"Very well, then, I'll go with you." She dragged him to the *cariole*, and somehow they crowded in together.

"Mush on, there! Mush!" she cried, and the dogs leaped out eagerly. The girl had no whip or other means of control, but as she shrilled her commands, the leaders swung instantly to right or left, taking the frail sledge safely around the inequalities of the wind-swept ice, and with the speed of the wind.

Temple's eyes filled with tears from the cutting cold, but he experienced a riotous exhilaration. Catching the infection of her high spirits he forgot the thing he had come to do in the joyous zest of being alive, and with her.

They circled back and came to rest where he had left his snow-shoes.

"Now, Mr. Righteous," she challenged, "if I'm guilty, so are you! Shall we have tea?"

"Yes," he asserted, recklessly, "let's run the whole gamut of crime!"

"Then you climb the bluff to the house, and I'll meet you there," she laughed. "I have to drive around by the notch in the bluff below the bend."

Fifteen minutes later they were in the low, trophy-hung library, chatting and basking in the heat of the great log-fire. The almost barbaric profusion of fur rugs on the floor gave a sense of primitive warmth and comfort which was heightened by the massive beams overhead, and the small, tight-set windows. Glowing and tingling with the frosty air, their spirits matched their sense of gorgeous well-being. Old Maria, the house servant, brought tea, and in response to that peculiar craving of the Northland they drank cup after cup of it.

In their gay talk the past was not mentioned nor was Temple's long absence commented on. Lightly, inconsequently, June played over the surface of things with a delicious garrulousness that stimulated and amused him.

But the purpose of his coming was constantly in his mind now, and he waited the indication of a veering mood which would give him the opportunity to broach it.

In an hour he felt the time approaching and nerved himself for his task. But suddenly the girl, who had been sitting so that she half-faced the window, sprang up with a little cry of astonishment and looked out. Then she ran to the window.

"Why, here's Jim Albert, and he's alone," she said, her voice sharp with concern. "I wonder why father isn't with him?" After a moment's anxious scrutiny she turned and ran across the room towards the door.

Temple had risen and he, too, saw the Indian. Vaguely alarmed by the girl's tone, he followed her into the hall and to the front door. They reached the veranda almost as soon as Jim Albert did. He was floundering heavily, and wore what the others could see now were broken snow-shoes. His dark face was gaunt, and his eyes seemed unnaturally large. He carried no pack.

As he reached the steps, he seemed to see the anxious girl for the first time.

“Factor hurt. I come on alone. Tea!” he gasped, and staggered on up the steps and past them. Through the door he went and into the kitchen where he collapsed in a chair, half-dazed.

June who had grown pale, followed him, and said a few sharp sentences in Ojibway to Maria. Then quietly, quickly, she moved about, doing what years of experience had told her was needful. Temple, without a word, knelt before the Indian and wrestled with the knotted snow-shoe thongs which were frozen as hard as iron.

Presently, revived by basin after basin of scalding tea, Jim Albert commenced to speak, jerking out guttural sentences piecemeal in his native tongue. June listened quietly, injecting a sharp question now and then. When he had finished, and had fallen ravenously upon the plate of food Maria had brought him, June beckoned Temple and led him into the living room.

"Father is badly hurt," she said, "and I must start north after him today. You can help me if you will. Jim will be able to go back with me in a few hours, but there is much to be done before that."

"Only command me," he begged. "I only hope I can be of some use. Is the situation serious?"

"Yes, very. A week ago father and Jim started south from Moose Factory. They counted on getting back here before snow came, and left with only enough grub to last a quick journey. That early blizzard caught them, and they were snowed up for two days. After that, they had to leave the canoe, and come on overland, but they had no snow-shoes.

"Half-way down Jim broke through the ice of a river they were crossing, and they lost half their grub. Then on the edge of a ravine, father went down with some loose snow and broke his leg. Jim dragged him to a deserted trapper's hut, half a day's journey farther on, and left him there with what grub there was. That's where he found those

broken snow-shoes. He came on here. We've got to start back today. Oh, poor father!" Her grief and anxiety mastered her for a moment, but she quickly regained control.

"But can Jim go back so quickly?" Temple asked. "Let me go down to camp and get one of our men."

"No. Your man wouldn't know the trail. Jim can do it, I think. Scarcely a winter passes but these Indians go through some experience like this. He'll be ready."

Paul said no more, and for the next two hours they worked fast, loading the travelling sledge that lay ready in the storehouse. To his relief Temple found that all he had learned at camp for use in the "Idyl" now stood him in good stead. His diamond hitches of the lashings across the completed load won even June's praise.

Under the circumstances, to discuss the thing for which he had come to Fort McLeod was impossible. He put the thought of it from his mind and bent all his energies upon his work. By three o'clock the sledge was

ready, and with the eight splendid dogs whining eagerly in the traces, and Jim marvellously recuperated at the gee-pole, June held out her hand to him in good-bye.

"You have helped me again when I needed you most," she said with deep feeling. "I wonder if I ever—ever will be able to repay you?"

He took her cold fingers between both his bare hands, and searched deep in her eyes. For a long moment they stood thus, and what he saw in those revealing depths made him thrill as he had never thrilled before.

"You have repaid me now," he said unsteadily, battling with a great desire to take her in his arms.

"No, not yet," she replied, and released her hand.

Jim Albert shouted to the dogs, they strained to the first effort, the sledge creaked as it left its tracks, and then moved across the clearing with increased speed. From the edge of the woods June turned to wave a last farewell. Paul replied to it, and

the next moment the forest had closed behind her.

All that day Jack Baillie had found that his injured foot was rapidly improving. In fact, so swift was its recovery that he declared that he would gladly walk home that night in order to spare the dogs. The location being but a short distance from Fort McLeod, the thought had occurred to stop there with his letter on the way back to camp.

He arrived at sundown to find the fort gloomy and deserted except for Maria and her husband, a decrepit brave who performed the chores about the place. When he learned that June was gone indefinitely, his fury was epic. And the prospect of the cold two-mile tramp home along the river trail did not add in the slightest degree to his good humour.

CHAPTER XV

REALIZATION

THE route that Jim Albert took to the deserted trapper's hut, where Fleming Magregor lay, was as direct as the crow flies; steadily north and a little east. He travelled without trail and without compass, following an instinct as sure as that of a homing pigeon. Gaunt and haggard, but mute and uncomplaining, he plodded on, knowing only that his factor needed him, and that June depended on him.

The country they traversed was virgin forest land. Here and there on a tree could be seen the mark of a timber cruiser's axe, but as yet no cutting had been done in the district. Douglas spruce, and larch, rose tall and straight, their branches feathery against a cold sky. The graceful, naked birches shivered in the biting wind.

The going was rough. It lay between hills, across frozen trout streams, down gullies and along ravines. Regularly the travellers changed places, whichever was trudging ahead to break a trail for the dogs, falling back to handle the gee-pole, and vice versa.

Sometimes on level stretches or on the solid ice of a stream, June or Albert rode, and sometimes both; while on downhill work they wrestled desperately with the swooping, skidding sledge, June behind at a tail rope, and Albert ahead at the gee-pole. The dogs, well-fed, fresh, and eager, worked hard. With heads low, tails high, and pink tongues flickering, they strained to the task that was at once their joy and pride. They seemed to relish this test of their mettle, after whisking June's light *cariole* about.

At last when the early sunset showed lemon-coloured between the silhouetted trees, June ordered a halt for the night. She knew to the ounce what to ask of Jim Albert, and she knew that she had asked it today. That he would go on at her command until he dropped,

past experience had taught her. But she saw beyond this day's travel, great though her anxiety and her father's need were. During the next few days there might be greater demands on them both, and it was then that they must be ready.

They selected for their camp a spot underneath the high north bank of a little stream, a spot so sheltered that but an inch or two of snow had drifted in during the recent blizzard. June helped Jim unharness the dogs, and, as always after a day's travel, examined the pads of their feet for cuts or bruises. Then, while she unlashd the sledge load, Jim chopped a hole in the ice of the stream for the dogs to drink, and set about gathering sufficient wood for that night and the following morning.

Next, June cleared a place for the fire and unpacked the lighter supplies, grub, utensils, and blankets. The pitching of the tent she left to Jim Albert. Unquestioningly she shared the common labour, for now they were beyond the pale of race or caste. Though they did not know it, they represented the

inconceivable bravery of the human soul. Together and alone, surrounded by the pitiless desolation, they dared nature's forces which, should they make one slip, stood ready to crush them. On every hand, illimitably, it seemed, stretched the wilderness. In it there was no help, no hope; from it no appeal. Life here was stripped to its lowest terms; to terms of food and warmth, to the one primal need of keeping the spark of life burning.

With the camp-fire crackling cheerfully Jim Albert thawed out the frozen, dried fish he had brought for the dogs, and gave them their one daily meal. When they had finished, the animals made their own beds, digging warm nests in the snow-drifts along the bank.

June had brought the tent for the sake of privacy rather than for any added warmth it would give her. The really severe weather of the winter had not yet come, and she would have been perfectly comfortable curled up beside the fire in her sleeping-bag, like Jim Albert. But now she emphasized their differ-

ence in caste as well as sex, for the factor's daughter is the true princess of the North.

Together they cooked supper and ate it. They talked little and then only about the disaster that had sent them on this journey. Jim washed the dishes in the remainder of the warm melted snow water, and a few minutes later June withdrew to her tent. Jim prepared for the night, and in half an hour, except for the glow of the fire and the motionless figure of the Indian beside it, there was no sign of life in the little camp. It was as if it had been absorbed into the immensity of the universal stillness.

The first crack of dawn found the Indian stirring, almost recovered from his hardship of the previous day. Breakfast was ready when June appeared, and they ate heartily. Then, loading the sledge with the skill of long practice they set out again, plodding doggedly into the trackless wastes, just as the sun rose full-globed above the south-east horizon.

For almost three days this was their existence, an existence of few words and great

effort, wrought out under a vast silence and in inconceivable loneliness. The creak of the sledge, the commands to the dogs, the white vapour of their breath, these were the tokens of animate things moving in a vast region of death.

But though they spoke little, June thought much. Fear for her father haunted her, but with the patient endurance, almost fatalism, that her environment had imposed upon her, she purposely turned her mind to other things.

Oftenest she thought of Temple, of Baillie, and of the strange events that had so recently entered her life to change and influence it. The farther she went from the scene of it all, the clearer, more detached, became her point of view. It was as if she had climbed some mountain and viewed things at last in their true perspective.

She had passed through much since that night of dread and terror on the island. Her first emotions had concerned her realization of Baillie's utter unworthiness. That final disillusionment and wreck of her girlish romance

had been a bitter experience. With her ideal had gone for a while faith in life, in human-kind, in everything. This was the phase she had been passing through the day Briscoe came to her with his offer of patronage.

Then in the midst of her overwhelming depression had come the memory of Temple, and of what he had brought into her life compared with Baillie. Brave, steadfast, quiet, always equal to the occasion, ringing true as pure metal, he had come gradually to represent (to her) the one refutation of humanity's baseness as typified by Baillie. He became her anchor to windward, the unassailable evidence of fine, true things. He saved her from bitter cynicism and a distorted image of life.

At this period her strongest feeling for Temple had been one of gratitude, a gratitude which she had tried vainly to express that day at the Fort. His startling reply to this effort, in abruptly leaving her, had bewildered and hurt her a little, but though she did not understand it, she did not waver in her allegiance to him.

That he loved her she knew. Not only had he told her so, but his every look and deed proved it. This being so, and he being what he was, this action must have had its good and sufficient reason, she felt. His subsequent long absence had given her time for meditation and for the final clarifying of her feelings. Just as with Temple, it had witnessed the realization of an approaching crisis in their relations.

This came in a strange guise. As day after day went by and she did not see Paul, she fell to dreaming of him. Alone at the Fort, she built for herself a world peopled only by themselves. She re-lived in imagination many of the things they had done together, recalled their talks, grave and gay. And gradually, as if he had been an essence, he commenced to permeate her life, to take possession of it. No waking or sleeping thought was free from his influence.

And because she had progressed from a girlish worship of his physical prowess to a woman's consciousness of his splendour in

deeper things, a new glory that was inexpressible came to surround him. The knowledge came at last that she loved him, and alone there she had gloried in it, singing and laughing through days of ecstasy when life had seemed too poignantly perfect to be true. He had found her in such a mood that morning of the ride upon the river ice.

Now, trudging along unbroken trails in the teeth of a cruel wind, every step taking her farther and farther from Paul, her heart cried out for him in this time of trouble. She longed to lean upon his calm, efficient strength—she who had never leaned on anybody—and to hear his words of comfort and courage.

But since that could not be, she found solace in the thought of that moment of farewell at the Fort. The memory of it quickened her with a strange, wild gladness, a delicious confusion. Then, as never before, she had felt the pull of that mighty hidden current of passion in Temple's nature. Compared with it the magnetism that Baillie had exerted upon her was as nothing. By its very suggestion of

undreamed depths it made her quiver with strange instinctive urgencies she dared not analyse.

And at such moments as these she saw clearly and finally the difference between her former feeling for Baillie and the one she now held for Paul. The first had been infatuation; hectic, opalescent—of tinsel and froth; this was love: deep, irresistible, permanent. The one was of the flesh, merely; the other a harmony of flesh, mind, and spirit, that trinity of life all parts of which are equal in holiness and beauty.

Bent forward against the wind, dog-weary after the frozen miles, she thought of these things; and the grim, waiting wilderness, the cold, the hunger, and the bodily fatigue, became as nothing. The world seemed a place warm and beautiful, and coloured with the glow of unspeakable dreams.

CHAPTER XVI

ON THE WINGS OF THE STORM

IT was almost four o'clock on the afternoon of the third day that Jim Albert broke through an alder and hazel thicket, and came out upon the sloping shore of a little lake. One swift glance and he gave a grunt of satisfaction. A moment later when June and the dogs reached him, he pointed silently across it. On the opposite shore, half a mile away, stood a small log cabin.

The girl through the fog of her weariness drew a quick breath.

"You left him there?" she asked, and searched uneasily for the plume of wood-smoke from the distant chimney that would tell of life within.

The Indian nodded. Then he pointed to the sledge.

“Missy ride; maybe Jim ride too.”

With the deliberate movements of complete exhaustion, the girl walked to the sledge and sank down on the duffle bag. Then because the wind-swept ice offered excellent surface, Jim followed her example, and mushed on the dogs. They responded well, but not with the fire of three days before.

The whole party showed the effects of their effort. On the trail by sunup daily, and travelling until after dark, each hour and minute had been a constant effort for speed, more speed, in their race against time. Jim Albert, in poor condition when the trip started, was constantly at the limit of his strength, and June, though always physically fit, had begun to fail under the sudden abnormal demand.

The huskies, as if sensing the end of the journey, bent to the work, and swinging wide to Jim's “gee” and “haw” snaked the sledge across the lake at a lope. The girl with constantly growing anxiety searched the clear air for the welcome smoke trail as they drew

near the northern shore, but there was no trace of it.

“You left father plenty of wood and matches?” she asked the Indian.

“Yes. After we fix him leg I cut heap wood. Pile um by bunk.”

With a merry jingle of harness bells the dogs took the sloping bank with a rush and came to rest at the top panting and steaming. June leaped off the sledge and hurried to the cabin. The heavy door of half logs was shut, and the small-paned windows covered thickly with hoar frost. The latter fact frightened the girl, for it meant that there was little if any heat inside. She pushed open the door and went in. The air was deadly chill.

The hut consisted of one room almost square and about eighteen by fifteen feet in size. In the centre stood a small, pot-bellied iron stove red with rust, the sheet-tin stove, pipe of which pierced a ceiling of loose poles and a roof of slabs. On the floor to the right were a few sticks of wood and, within hand-reach a rude bunk made of caribou

skin stretched on a framework of birch poles.

Here June found her father, wrapped in sleeping-ropes and blankets, and, to judge by his quick breathing, apparently asleep. She went towards him eagerly, but, with the quick precaution of her training, laid her hand upon the stove even as she knelt beside him. Its faint warmth told her that the fire had not been dead long, and that they had arrived just in time. Another twelve hours would have made their trip in vain.

Quickly, practically, she appraised her father's condition. He was sleeping heavily but unnaturally. A bright spot of fever burned in each cheek and he muttered in delirium. She knew that he lay in the fever coma that was the result of his injury and the exposure that had followed it.

Stepping to the door she called Jim and together they set about the urgent work of fire-making, their fatigue forgotten in the joy of their success. As June worked, she took in other details of her surroundings. It was

obvious, as Jim had said, that the cabin was a deserted trapper's hut. Visible chinks in the log walls and a puddle of melted snow water on the floor, which told of a leaky roof, testified to its dilapidation. The wind whistled mournfully through these apertures. Fleming Magregor's was the only bunk. In one corner was an old provision box, and in another a rusted trap, broken beyond all hope of repair. The dead weeds of the previous summer still clung to the earthen floor.

Here indeed was work to be done, and when the little round stove was roaring, and the stovepipe crackling with new heat, they plunged into it. As fire was the first necessity, food was the second. June found on top of the stove the empty tin dishes that had held her father's meagre rations, and tears filled her eyes at their pitiful, mute testimony to his long days of hunger. With anxious haste she melted snow in a saucepan and commenced the preparation of a broth.

When it was ready she succeeded, with Jim Albert's help, in getting the sick man to drink

a little of it. The scalding stuff gradually brought him back to consciousness, and he recognized June and the Indian. Then after taking the medicines June had brought, he sank back to sleep refreshed, and with the knowledge that all was well.

But the girl, with life-long experience of wilderness accidents, knew that it would be two or three days before he would be entirely rational again.

The simple camp arrangements were quickly made. June piled her usual mattress of pine boughs on the floor by the stove and prepared to stay by her father's side. She gave the tent to Jim Albert and he made a snug bivouac in the lee of the lake shore, though expecting to cook the meals for the camp and eat with the others in the cabin.

That first night and all the next day the two stood alternate four-hour watches beside the sick man. So great was their fatigue after the race north, that they dropped asleep the minute they were relieved. But despite this they gradually repaired the cabin, so that

by the second day it was a clean, wind-stopped habitation.

"When take um factor south?" inquired Jim, as he boiled the tea that noon.

"Not yet," June told him. "He isn't strong enough to be moved yet."

Albert grunted and held up the thumb of his right hand.

"Snow," he said laconically.

June looked thoughtful. Jim's aching rheumatic thumb infallibly forecasted bad weather, and she knew there would be snow within forty-eight hours. Could they risk the delay? She estimated their resources carefully. With the ordinary blizzard of this time of year, and allowing an extra day for the journey south, she felt they would be safe, though their margin for emergencies would be small. But against this she set the incalculable benefit to her father of the added days of rest and nursing, and she decided to remain.

Next morning they made their final preparations. Jim chopped quantities of wood, guyed the faithful but declining stovepipe

with moose gut from an old snow-shoe, and reinforced the chinks between the logs. Late that afternoon the temperature rose ten degrees, a black, ugly-looking mass of clouds drove down from the north on a howling gale, and the snow began.

At dinner the Indian came in breathless, his dark face wet with melted flakes.

"By Gar, a bad one," he said. "You no go out tonight, missy. No can see, no can hear. One blow of wind and pouf! you gone. Dogs dig in ver' deep tonight."

At seven o'clock he went, not to return until morning, June having refused his offer to share watches with her that night. When he had gone she placed the two candles which lighted the cabin on a stump, and drawing the provision box close to the stove, sat down to mend her father's clothes which had been damaged on the disastrous trip south.

About her was the constant clamour of the storm, the trembling and creaking of the cabin, the clicking of icy flakes against the win-

dows, and the roaring diapason of the forest as the wind swept through it.

And in her solitude she thought of Temple. What was he doing now, she wondered. How much longer would he remain in the North? He had told her that the Graphics had almost finished their work, and she wondered what the completion of it would bring to them both. The thought brought home to her more sharply than ever before the contrast between their lives, and she tried to visualize the existence to which he would return.

The high lights of that existence she knew from Baillie's glowing description of it, but now she found that she could not orientate Paul clearly in its setting, and she realized with a little shock of surprise how really little she knew about him.

Would he resume a gay, butterfly life such as Baillie had used so often to dazzle her ignorant eyes? Where did he live? Who were his friends? He had told her none of these things, except in a general way on the first day of their meeting, and she tried to

imagine them. The result was a glorified picture of him moving commandingly amid a world of splendour.

Against this picture her own equipment for the world seemed petty, childish, worthless. Even though he did love her, she thought mournfully, could she ever hope to keep his love among the glorious, radiant creatures who, she was sure, inhabited his universe?

The storm without raged in a sudden spasm of fury, shaking the flimsy hut as if it were a toy in the hand of a giant. The tiny rataplan of the snow increased to a frenzied drumming and the forest shouted its tumult. Then suddenly there came a lull of almost absolute stillness when, to June, the sputter of a candle sounded loudly.

And in that moment there sounded a feeble tapping at the door and a faint moan. Startled, June straightened up. Then she smiled with relief. Probably one of the dogs, unable to find shelter from the wind, was pleading to be taken into the cabin. The girl had just

resumed her sewing when the sounds came again, louder this time.

Puzzled and a little alarmed, the girl rose and put down her work. Dogs did not whine like that. Crossing the room she raised the stick of wood that barred the door and swung it open, only to start back in amazement. The next instant a human figure swayed towards her, and she threw her arms out just in time to catch it as it fell. The storm, sweeping down again with renewed fury, drew a great draft of air out into the night, and extinguished one of the flickering candles. In the darkness June dragged her burden inside, shut the door again and barred it.

Relighting the candle she returned to the prostrate figure which she discovered now, was that of a woman. Turning the stranger over she saw framed in the capote of the rich furs, an unconscious face, pinched and blue with cold and exhaustion. A hasty examination revealed a white patch of frostbite on one cheek, but the hands, when she had drawn off the gloves, were unscathed.

Yet those hands fascinated June. White and delicate, obviously unused to the toil of their environment, the fingers were loaded with rings whose gems glittered in the dim candle light.

For an instant the girl sat dazed before an absolutely insoluble problem. That anyone should have reached the cabin, one tiny dot in an illimitable wilderness, on a night like this, was miracle enough; but that it should be a woman, and one patently alien to her surroundings, almost partook of the supernatural. Who was this stranger, and whence had she come?

After the first moment of inaction, June recovered herself and set about restoring the other. Leaving her on the floor, she got a basin of tea from the saucepanful which constantly simmered on top of the stove, and forced some of it down the stranger's throat. Then she commenced gently to strip off the other's furs.

These in their quality and completeness, astonished the girl. Evidently their owner

knew how to dress for the northern winter. Beneath the furs she found a beautifully made suit of rich material.

Chafing the helpless woman's hands, and forcing her to drink more hot tea from time to time, she applied the only restoratives she knew. Finally there was a convulsive gasp, a heaving of the chest, and the eyelids fluttered. A moment later they opened wide and stared unseeingly up at the pole ceiling.

"There!" said June. "I guess you're all right now. Drink some of this," and again she offered the tea.

The stranger, as if roused by the sound of the human voice, turned her head and looked at June with blue eyes in which the light of reason was rapidly dawning.

"Who—wha—where am I?" she said faintly after a prolonged scrutiny.

"You're in a cabin on Loon Lake," June told her. "I found you outside fifteen minutes ago. You were out in the storm but you fainted when I opened the door."

"Ah— Oh, I remember now. . . . The

storm. I saw your light . . . I thought I'd never make it." Her imperious brows contracted suddenly and a look of annoyance crossed her face. "Why didn't you come sooner?" she demanded with a flash of irritation. "I thought I'd die out there. I almost did."

June looked at her in amazement. This was not the spirit of the North.

"I came as soon as I could," she explained, "and of course I understand how you felt. But tell me—if you don't mind my asking—where have you come from, how on earth do you happen to be here? I had no idea there was anyone within a hundred miles of us."

"You didn't!" It was the other's turn to be astonished. "I thought everybody knew about us. I'm Gertrude Mackay of Al Bergman's Stellar Film Company, and we're up here doing a big piece. Our camp's on an arm of Loon Lake and I was takin' a look around when that damn blizzard came up. I was tryin' to find my way back when I saw your light and just made it before I keeled over."

CHAPTER XVII

CONFLICT

JUNE MAGREGOR looked with new interest upon the incongruous visitor the storm had brought fainting to that lonely cabin on Loon Lake. Miss Mackay sat on the floor drinking hot tea and recovering her strength.

"You belong to a moving picture company?" asked June, astonished and at the same time glad to have reached common ground so soon. She set before the other a plate of food she had hastily prepared.

"Yes; Al Bergman's Stellar Films, the greatest in the business. And say, this big piece we're doing up here, 'The Madgalene of the Snows' will knock 'em cold when it's released." Suddenly Miss Mackay set her tin cup down beside her with a grimace, and

felt curiously of her right cheek where a white spot on the flesh had begun to throb and ache.

"It's only a touch of the frost," said June. "If it hurts too much go outside again and thaw it out by holding your bare hand over it."

"Me go out again in *that!*" The other laughed. "Watch me! But dearie, you might get a little snow to rub on it. That'll do just as well."

June stared for an instant.

"No," she explained, "that's the worst thing you could possibly do. If the rough snow happened to scratch that spot infection would set in and might result in blood poisoning. The bare hand is the only safe way." She added a second suggestion that to escape pain the other stand outdoors in the lee of the cabin.

But Gertrude was obstinate, and compromised by sitting on one of the rude seats near the door where there was the least heat from the stove. Quite recovered now, she examined the dimly lighted interior of the cabin

from this vantage point and suddenly became aware of Fleming Magregor. The factor lay quietly asleep in his bunk.

"My father," June explained in a low voice. Then she told her name, where she lived, and the circumstances leading up to her occupancy of the cabin.

"But the strangest thing," she concluded with a laugh of amusement, "is that we started north from one moving-picture camp and almost blundered on another one in the middle of nowhere. It's bewildering."

Gertrude, who had been obediently holding her hand to her face, looked up sharply.

"What moving-picture camp did you start north from?"

"The Graphic. You see, it's located only two miles up-stream from Fort McLeod where we live. They've been there all the fall, but they're nearly finished now, I understand."

"Just how much *do* you understand, I wonder?" the woman asked herself; then said aloud:

"The Graphics! Well, the world is a small

place! To think of being hauled out of a blizzard by somebody that knows that bunch! I suppose you do know 'em?"

"Oh, yes, nearly all; Mr. Briscoe and Miss French and Mr. Baillie and Mr. Temple and Miss Tanner, and a lot more."

"Yes, sir, it's the same old gang," said Gertrude, genially. "Well, doesn't this beat the devil! And I suppose Temple is still playing their leads?" with an air of curiosity.

"Yes, of course, but"—with a little unconscious pride—"he's doing some directing now, too. Short stuff with a punch!" naïvely.

"Oh, he is!" The woman turned away to hide her surprise and chagrin. This was news, and the kind she liked least to hear, since it glorified her husband. Furthermore, this girl seemed to show a familiar interest in Paul Temple. Gertrude's impersonal gossipy interest in the doings of another camp had suddenly become localized. But the girl must not suspect, and she herself mustn't be too curious tonight. She rose and walked to the stove and back, regardless of her thawing cheek.

"Guess you must have thought that Tom Briscoe was starting a squirrel farm when he showed up with that bunch of nuts," she said lightly, and joined the girl's laughter. "Or maybe you took to 'em; some people do, you know." She yawned.

"Oh, I liked them all from the first. It was strange and new, of course, but everyone was so charming, and—but"—noting the yawn—"forgive me, you must be worn out after your experience this afternoon. How is the cheek?" She rose and lifted the candle to examine it. "Oh, doing nicely. I'll put something on for the night and by morning the worst will be over."

The storm which seemed to have increased in intensity rather than abated, shook the cabin with its fierce gusts, thuttering down the chimney and swaying the candle flames.

Gertrude Mackay looked about her. She saw a blanket-covered pile of spruce boughs within arm's reach of the sleeping factor; that was all.

"Where am I to sleep?" she asked.

"There," said June, pointing to the wilderness bed hospitably. "I'll roll up on the floor near the stove for tonight, and Jim can cut me some sort of a bed tomorrow."

Miss Mackay, the cosmopolite, looked about her, horrified, for some partition, some means of privacy. Miss Magregor who had camped alone with Jim Albert a dozen times hummed a tune as she made her hard bed. The matter-of-factness of the girl's calm acceptance of the situation shocked this woman, some of whose escapades had been the talk of Broadway. After all, environment determines customs and conventions. Twice she turned angrily to protest, but a feeling that she was about to make a fool of herself restrained her. Finally, with a helpless shrug, she accepted the situation, and removing her dress crawled between the blankets.

But after the lights were out her mounting sense of injury and anger impelled her to make one thrust.

"I suppose you people have to live without the privacies and decencies of life," she

said, "but one probably gets used to it after a while."

June uttered some inadequate response, and silence fell except for the black clamour of the storm.

Between attending her father, keeping up the fire, and pondering over the new situation that had arisen, June did not sleep much that night, and she was distinctly grateful when, at the earliest glimmer of light, she heard Jim Albert stumble against the door.

She rose, drew the bar, and he staggered in with a great armful of firewood. Finger on lips to enjoin silence, she recounted in a low voice the events of the night before. He glanced down at the white, beautiful face of the stranger, imperious-looking even in sleep, and shrugged.

"More people, less grub," he said, not in resentment, but merely stating a fact that was uppermost in both their minds. A straight line of concern appeared on June's forehead for a moment, but she said nothing

and set about getting the breakfast by the light of the candles.

June's movements and the noise of the pans presently awoke Gertrude who, when she realized where she was, lay with eyes closed, thinking. The talk of Paul the night before recurred to her sharply. It was characteristic of her that, though she refused to live with her husband, she held in suspicion every woman who knew him, as witness her jealousy of Marguerite French. What did June's frankly expressed interest in him imply, she wondered. Anything more than the usual feminine awe of America's greatest screen star? She determined to use the day before her to find out.

Presently she let it become known that she was awake, and yawning luxuriously asked if she might have her breakfast in bed. It was her usual custom, she confessed.

June showed no surprise.

"Why, yes," she replied, "if you don't mind my Indian, Jim Albert, eating here too. He sleeps outside in the tent, but we all eat together."

Miss Mackay sat bolt upright.

"What! You eat with one of those niggers! Really—!" Words failed her. But presently, when June made no reply, she flung aside the blankets and got up. "I should think hemight at least wait till we're through," she said, resentfully.

June, making every allowance for the other, patiently explained the code of necessity that lay back of these customs. By this time Fleming Magregor was awake and June presented the newcomer. He was quite free of fever now, and stoically patient under the discomfort of his knitting bone. He learned from Gertrude of the incidents of the night before, and courteously expressed his satisfaction at her fortunate finding of the cabin. A few minutes later Jim Albert returned, stamping and shaking himself free of snow.

"Storm no stop," he said in answer to June's question. "Snow two days yet, maybe three."

Through the square windows of the cabin the dark morning light showed the white

sheets of flakes driving past and the trees bending before the wind.

June who, with an extra mouth to feed, had prepared a careful ration of bacon and beans, served Miss Mackay first.

"Say, have a heart," said the latter amusedly, looking at her tin plate. "I'm hungry."

There was an instant's pregnant silence. Then June increased her portion, an act which automatically left less for the other three.

"I'm sorry," she said, "but you see we're short of provisions, and we must keep enough for our journey south. I must get father back to the Fort as soon as I can, and every day of this storm makes a difference."

Gertrude made no reply, but sat down as far away from Jim as possible. Except for occasional remarks, by the factor, conversation languished.

June was silent. She was trying to fit her conceptions to this new experience. The woman, who had so abruptly projected herself into a situation already serious, was a bewildering problem. Not only was she totally alien

to her environment and its necessities, but she seemed equally strange to the amenities of social intercourse. June was for the first time facing utter selfishness, and she did not quite know how to meet it.

Gertrude had received the added portion of food grudgingly and without gratitude. What could be the life, past and present, June wondered, of a woman who, knowing the circumstances of the party in the cabin, could do that?

It had been Jim Albert's custom to wash the dishes and do what little work the cabin required, but this morning June sent him back to his tent with the assurance that she would clean up. As she did so, Gertrude with a sudden return of good temper and vivacity, drew up one of the crude seats beside Fleming Magregor's bunk and opened a conversation. He was a little surprised. One glance at the broadcloth dress she wore and her jewel-laden fingers had told him that she represented a type new in his experience.

While she worked, June was aware in a

general way that the talk revolved constantly around the "profession," a subject on which Gertrude seemed tireless and inexhaustible, and when she had finished she joined them. Gertrude welcomed her with a peculiar smile.

"I was just saying," she explained, "that this Paul Temple you mentioned last night is on the skids. These bunk heroes only last so long, you know, and then they get the swelled head or lose their looks. Temple's doing both, they tell me."

Inwardly June bridled a little, but she gave no outward sign of it. Was this, she wondered, a sample of the professional jealousy Baillie had so often complained of, as keeping him from his rightful place among the great?

"I don't know much about such things," she replied gravely, "but I'm sure they're not true of Mr. Temple. He's very modest, and everybody in his company seems to like him." Mentally she excepted Baillie. "And I think he's very good looking," she added.]

"Oh, you do!" Gertrude laughed a little too loudly.

"Yes."

But for the strangely inimical feeling this woman roused in her, June could have poured out a rhapsody, so deep and proud was her love for him.

"You know him quite well, then?" Gertrude politely included Fleming Magregor in the question.

"Oh, yes, he comes to the Fort often," said the factor. "Wi' one thing and another we're gude friends. There was that day now when we went huntin'." He threw back his head and laughed silently. Then while Gertrude urged him flatteringly, he described with dry humour the long, fruitless hunt for deer. June could have added a surprising end to that tale.

"Yes," he concluded, "I owe him a deer, but I owe him more than that. He saved the lassie's life one day." Some time since the factor had been told of that desperate adventure in the rapid.

"Ah!" The woman's lips formed a smile, but her eyelids had narrowed. "Do tell me about it."

"You see," said June, "the reason we knew the Graphic people so well was that they had taken a lot of scenes at the Fort. I happened to be in one or two of them by chance and——"

"Oh, you're acting for the pictures too, eh? A young genius right in our busy midst and I never suspected it. No wonder you know Temple well. But go on."

The white hands in her lap had unconsciously clenched. Because hers was a nature which in its endless self-seeking had never found happiness or satisfaction, the knowledge that Paul whom she had repudiated had found these things was like a cancer in her soul. She hated him for it, and she hated those associated with him. Now she hated June.

Quite ingenuously and a little eagerly, because of this woman's obvious desire to belittle Paul, the girl told of that day in the gorge. And as, unconsciously, her voice thrilled in praise of the man she loved, and her eyes glowed in memory of his splendid courage, the hypersensitive ears of the woman opposite first imagined, and then knew that

they were listening to a *credo* of worship, a confession of love, pure and unashamed. When she had finished Gertrude was quick to applaud.

"Splendid! splendid!" she cried, and then, quite pale, she sprang up and walked to the door. "Whew! it's hot in here!" she flung over her shoulder in explanation. Opening the door she stood looking with unseeing eyes into the white swirl of the storm. When she had recovered her outward poise she shut the door again and returned to the others, but did not sit down.

"And how about Temple's affair with Marguerite French?" she asked a little unsteadily. "In New York they had 'em married, you know."

June was conscious of an unpleasant shock of distaste, but she answered calmly enough:

"That must be a mistake. Paul and Miss French are good friends, but almost never see each other except at work. She is not intimate with anyone."

Gertrude Temple turned away again to

fight down the "How do *you* know so much about it?" that sprang to her lips. Her eyes smarted with tears of fury.

"So that's it, eh?" she said to herself. "Then it wasn't French at all. It was this one."

CHAPTER XVIII

REPRISAL

A GREAT light had broken upon Gertrude Temple. Swiftly she thought back to the letter she had received months ago from Paul begging her to divorce him. That letter had come from the Graphic camp in the wilderness, and Gertrude had concluded instantly that Marguerite French had inspired it. Her reply, which Temple had received the day he first met June, showed this.

Now the conviction of error came. She believed that Paul, meeting this girl of the wild, had become infatuated with her and had sought his freedom on her account. That June loved Paul, Gertrude was certain, and she was only too willing to surmise that he loved her. But what of the understanding between them?

Did June know that he was married?

The leading lady of the Stellar Films paced the narrow confines of the cabin like a caged animal.

"Anybody got a cigarette?" she flung out in the midst of her meditations. "Lord! I want a whiff!"

The polite bewilderment of her auditors that preceded the negative answer, was the last proof to Gertrude of the impossibility of these people. And this girl had conquered the man she had failed to hold! She experienced the fury of an outraged dog-in-the-manger.

Did June know that Paul was married?

While the tedious, storm-racked hours dragged by, the woman studied the girl. In all she did and said there seemed to be a subdued joy, an exaltation that was from within, of the soul. Sometimes she sang softly; sometimes a tender, preoccupied look filled her eyes, and she seemed lost in the contemplation of some radiant other world. Thus, without even the previous evidence of glowing speech, Gertrude knew. Such se-

renity, such faith and joy, could mean but one thing.

Noon came, and dinner. Up to this time Gertrude had not lifted her hand to help, and she did not offer now. Apparently the idea never occurred to her. She was a guest and therefore exempt. If you took a stranger, injured by an automobile, into your Riverside Drive apartment, you hardly expected them to do the housework, she reasoned. As a matter of fact, Gertrude rather prided herself on her restraint and good temper under the circumstances.

Deprived of her maid and bath, both at camp, this whole experience was very trying. She might at least be spared menial labour. But June, unable to conceive the other's viewpoint, added this barbarism to Miss Mackay's already long list. The women were irreconcilably opposed at every view-point of life.

Dinner consisted of bacon, beans, flapjacks, and stewed dried fruit, and Gertrude regarded the outlay with ill-concealed dissatisfaction.

But she was so hungry that even the extra portion that June gave her left her ravenous. She managed to forgive the diet. But she could not forgive Jim Albert's presence at table.

Angered by this, constantly hungry, and greatly upset by June's revelations regarding Paul, she faced her hours of imprisonment in an evil frame of mind. Outside the storm raged on with a monotonous roar that was nerve-racking. Gertrude felt like a trapped beast, and paced back and forth lashing herself into a fury of discontent.

Through it all June, though sorely tried, kept a firm hand upon herself. Twice Gertrude with bursts of ill-temper made an open break imminent, but June avoided it on each occasion. The result was that Gertrude was baffled and left impotently in the wrong.

She felt this, and doing so realized that this wilderness girl who scarcely knew the "de-cencies" of life was defeating her, keeping the upper hand in their relationship, and with

smarting pride she compared herself with June in Paul's sight.

The result was costly.

The bit of mirror that hung against the wall told disagreeable truths. Deprived for a day of the aids which she had long considered necessary to beauty, she looked sallow and (to herself) unkempt. Little wrinkles at the corners of her eyes and on her forehead showed with startling plainness, and there were deep indentations from her nose to the corners of her mouth.

This was only the physical comparison; the mental was equally disastrous. Twice forced to change the subject when June had skilfully turned the conversation upon books, her poverty of thought, even of vocabulary, stood out glaringly.

It was unnecessary to seek further. Gertrude knew that if Paul had any love left in him, this girl had won it; she was exactly the type of idiot he would adore—had wanted herself to be. The stinging, indubitable fact that this girl was her successor made Gertrude giddy.

The thought was unendurable, not because she loved Paul or regretted leaving him, but because she could not support the idea of anyone else succeeding where she had failed. Her glances of fury promised an early revenge.

Meanwhile June, serenely ignorant of the storm that was gathering round her head, resumed her sewing, interrupted the night before, gave her father his medicine, and sitting beside him they chatted in the intimate companionable way they had.

At sunset came Jim Albert, with quantities of wood for the night and spruce boughs for June's bed. The candles were lighted and June commenced to get supper. The meal threatened again to consist of bacon, beans, and tea until Jim, his round face beaming, brought in a whitefish he had caught through a hole in the ice of the lake.

The fact averted an outburst from Gertrude whose patience with everything, especially the diet, was at an end. After the meal she deliberately led the conversation back to the

subject of the "profession" and, by imperceptible transitions, to the Graphics and Paul. Her face was quite pale, and her usually full lips were compressed to a thin line. Her eyes glittered with the hardness of sapphires. Fleming Magregor, wearied with the long day, fell asleep while she talked.

June, to whom Paul was ever a welcome subject of conversation, recalled her last night's speculation concerning his life in the metropolis, and sought enlightenment.

"You knew Mr. Temple in New York, I suppose?" she asked, feeling a little twinge of envy.

Gertrude laughed.

"Oh, Lord, yes—quite well, in fact." She was alive to the ironical humour in the question and the present situation.

"Oh, I'm so glad! Then you can tell me what I want to know. What is his life there like—I mean his life outside of the studio? What does he do to amuse himself? Who are his friends?" June coloured a little, as if to apologize for so deep an interest.

Gertrude laughed again, and this time there was an ugly note in the sound.

"Oh, he's a devil for speed, Paul is! He reads books something terrible. Or he stays up late working out sets for new pictures. Why, sometimes I've actually know, him to go to a show. Oh, I tell you there's *nothing* Paul won't do after work hours!"

June felt the sarcasm and was a little non-plussed. Why should Paul's manner of life annoy Miss Mackay so much? Then she was conscious of Gertrude leaning forward, amusement still curling her lips.

"You're pretty keen on Paul, ain't you, Miss Magregor?"

To a girl of her own age and sensibility June might have confided a rhapsody upon the man she loved, but something in this question, in the asker's tone, look, and manner restrained her.

"I like him very much," she said with a certain reserved dignity. "He's the best friend I have in the world."

"You don't say!" with forced, polite sur-

prise. "But say, I'd feel awful sorry for anybody that married *him*."

In the silence that ensued the sleeping factor stirred, and the perpetual clicking of snowflakes against the windows swelled in crescendo as a blast of wind drove them. The forest bellowed with a vast, reverberating voice, and the two candles, that served to reveal the women to each other, flickered. A stick in the stove snapped.

"Why?"

"Well, I'll tell you." The hard eyes gleamed with satisfaction. "I suppose you've heard of these what they call vampire-women that kill all the good in a man, and ruin his life, and all that?" June nodded vaguely. "Well, Paul's a vampire-man. Any woman that married him would have to give up everything in the world but breathing, and play second fiddle forever, amen. He'd want her to know all about how great he is, but he'd see that *she* didn't get any chance to be great herself."

The venom that filled the words was not

lost upon June. The girl was saying to herself: "Even if what she says is true, why should she be so bitter about it?" Aloud she said:

"I can't imagine his being like that. He seems to me the most unselfish man in the world."

"Naturally!"—smirking—"but you don't know him. If there's one thing he couldn't stand, it would be the success of his own wife. He's a great one for the woman in the home, awful strong for little feet pattering about the place, and all that."

June experienced a faint, sweet confusion. But only for an instant. She was trying to fight down a prescience of something sinister that had suddenly flung its shadow above her. What it was she did not know; she only knew it existed, and that, somehow, it seemed to have emanated like an evil aura from Gertrude Mackay.

"Mr. Temple never talked like that to me," she hesitated, "and he was always trying to help the people of his company to do better,

the women as well as the men. Especially Miss Tanner, who isn't awfully brilliant, you know."

"Yes, I know," drily. "Well," her eyes glittered, "if you'll take the word of one who's had him right for years, you'll believe what I say." Her mouth twisted as she tried to smile. "He's a faker and a scoundrel, and he's lied to you."

Instinctively June rose to her feet, her eyes blazing into those other eyes that met hers now with a fixed intensity of hatred. At the same time she felt shudderingly as if the tentacles of some loathsome evil had closed about her.

"How dare you say that?" she cried. "It's not true! I shan't believe it!"

"How dare I?" Gertrude spoke with the calm insolence of triumph. "Who has a better right? I am his wife, and have been for five years."

"You—*what*——!"

The girl could not go on. She stood mute, transfixed.

"I'm his wife," the other repeated, "a mere trifle he forgot to mention—to you."

Her revenge was sweet. The look on that stricken face afforded her a poignant pleasure, an exquisite satisfaction. Gone was her sense of baffled defeat by this girl. Hers was the upper hand now.

June stood quite still, her colour ebbing until she was as white as paper. For the first moments the bare shock of the statement blurred all her thoughts and feelings. Then every faculty rallied to defence.

"I don't believe you—I won't." Her voice was low, passionless, monotonous. "He couldn't have done that to me."

"Believe me or not, it's the truth." She lifted the finger that should have borne her wedding ring. "But we haven't been proud of it for quite a while, and I've quit advertising the fact. It interferes with business, you know." She smiled quite pleasantly.

Through the daze of her pain June knew that the woman had not lied, dared not lie. No sane motive could be behind the folly

of such untruth. Gertrude was obviously sane. Vaguely, for the first time, June realized the hatred against her of this woman whose life she had saved.

Then even as the torrent of words and tears gushed up, pride came to her rescue. After all no definite understanding existed between herself and Paul. She loved him but he had not spoken the final word that asked her to be his. With a superhuman effort she brought herself under control. Deliberately she threw a stick of wood into the stove and resumed her former seat.

"I congratulate you," she said in a strangely calm voice. "I've been told that actors had wives tucked away in almost every corner of the world. But," she added with an inspiration that was not of herself, "if I were Paul Temple's wife I should be absurdly proud of the fact. No woman could be really worthy of him, you know."

Gertrude Temple was stung out of her self-complacency. Here were not the tears and grief of shattered young romance, but rather

self-possession and a retort with a sting in it. Had she made a mistake, she wondered? Had she saddled herself with a husband again to no real purpose? Her triumph commenced to wear the look of failure.

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CHAPTER XIX

COMPENSATION

SOMEHOW June got through the remainder of that evening, but when she lay down on her bed of spruce boughs it was to face the stark truth defenceless. The storm which bellowed and flailed on in its blind fury was a fit accompaniment to her thoughts. Sometimes when the hut creaked and swayed with the force of the blast she wished that it would suddenly collapse upon her and blot out everything; the task of living seemed too great.

All life seemed unreal. She felt as if she were floating in a vast black void without means of support, and her distracted brain pictured this as her life to be—dull, blind existence in a universe from which the sun had gone and the earth slipped from beneath her feet.

So Paul was a scoundrel like Baillie! She shivered and refused the thought recognition. She dared not face it now. After the events and hardships of the last week that way led to madness. She must think—think hard of anything, everything else; of her father's needs, of the physical aspects of their situation here, of the projected journey south.

Paul Temple a scoundrel like Baillie——

There was the food! They still had so many pounds of bacon, beans, flour, tea, and dried fruit. Granting that the storm lasted two days longer, and that they made a fair day's journey southward, how many ounces of each provision could she allow per meal per person, granting of course that Miss Mackay, no, Mrs. Temple— She brought up with a shock. She had circled back.

Paul was married! Paul had done this incredible, inconceivable thing!

Desperately she took up the food problem again. Her mind worked like the spring of a steel trap. She juggled incredible fractions with nightmare ease, doggedly fighting off

that red-hot stab of pain that came with the constantly recurring words, "Paul is married! Paul is married!" . . .

At last everything became one hopeless jumble, and utterly worn out mentally and physically, she fell asleep.

Morning brought light to her eyes but none to her soul. Mrs. Temple arose in surprisingly good humour. During breakfast she uncovered a fund of anecdote which caused the worldly-wise old factor to squirm in his bunk. As if by tacit agreement neither woman revealed to Magregor Gertrude's married state.

But this did not prevent the latter's discussing the fact *sotto voce*. She took a hand in the housework in order to have June for an audience. A new twist of her character manifested itself in the delight with which she welcomed a new listener to the long story of her wrongs at Paul's hands.

"The first year we were married things were all right," she confided. "We were in the same company. But the second year, when

Paul couldn't get anything in New York he wanted me to go out on the road with him. I told him that it would do us more good for me to stay on Broadway pulling wires, but no, he wouldn't see it.

“‘I married to have a wife and a home,’ says he, ‘and if we can't live together in New York, we can on the road.’ Now, can you beat *that* for selfishness? And when I refused to go, he was wild. He was so afraid I'd get a Broadway engagement he couldn't see. And when I began to make friends that might have given us a lift, was he pleased and grateful? Like the devil he was! Somebody wrote him a lot of lies about me, and he came in from the road so hot-foot he burned shoe-leather.

“And then we had it out. He wanted me to give up my friends and go with him. The nerve! As if I'd go pluggin' around some kerosene circuit when I had friends in New York that burned the town after nightfall! Now that shows you what kind of a guy he was, unreasonable and selfish. Why, one of

these cobry snakes is full of affection alongside of him!"

This was just the beginning. When Margregor dropped off for his morning nap, she went on in a louder tone, following June about as she talked, a half-dried tin plate or forgotten stick of wood in her hand.

June was almost beside herself. In the narrow confines of the cabin there was no escape, and the girl whose every nerve was as raw as if it had been cut with a knife, wanted to scream and rush out into the blessed relief of the storm.

But once more her pride saved her. Suspecting that Gertrude was deliberately tormenting her by talking of Paul, she grimly accepted the challenge. All morning the strange contest went on. Then, as so often happens in life, out of this bitterest trial, came unexpected good. Gertrude slowly but inevitably accomplished her own defeat.

As she reviewed her experiences her sense of injury increased, and the wrongs she had suffered at Paul's hand grew correspondingly.

Blessed with a luxuriant imagination where personal feeling was concerned, the luridness of incident and detail in her narrative grew until these at last rang false even upon June's unsophisticated ear. The girl knew she was lying, and the realization marked the turning of the tide.

Thinking back over all Gertrude had said, June realized a strange fact. Gertrude, trying her hardest to damage Paúl, had unconsciously painted a portrait of him that was a counterpart of the one experience had enshrined in her own heart. Because the woman's point of view had been so distorted and untrue, she had unwittingly left in high relief those qualities for which June had always loved him. With incredible venom Gertrude had proved her husband to be simple, honourable, sensitive, patient, and fine.

And because of this, a new tremulous faith in Paul commenced to reassert itself in June. The fact that he had concealed his marriage from her remained of course an inexplicable contradiction and a barrier between them,

but now she advanced to that barrier unafraid.

Complete, unquestioning trust had always characterized her former feeling for him. This trust had helped her through the poignant girlish disillusionment regarding Baillie; it had asked no questions when Paul remained away apparently without excuse for a fortnight; and it had palliated his sudden leaving of her that day in the living room of the Fort when she had tried to express her gratitude for all he had done.

Gertrude had unconsciously vindicated Paul's character. Could not June then extend her faith in him even to include his failure to tell of his marriage? Perhaps there had been some great, compelling reason that had sealed his lips. She believed it, though imagination failed to suggest that reason.

And there was another question too. Why had he not told her early in their friendship? Was he, like Gertrude, loth to admit the galling yoke for business reasons? She did not know. She must await his answers before she condemned him finally.

From that moment a change came over June. She forgot the storm, the close cramped quarters of the cabin, and the half-starvation she had known since Gertrude's arrival. Serene in the possession of her new faith, she cared not if the other rambled on forever; each new word only added to her consciousness of victory.

She commenced to sing softly to herself as she went about her work; once more she bubbled over with a subdued, tremulous happiness, as shy and courageous as the first flower of spring.

Gertrude viewed this phenomenon dumbfounded. Everything had been so satisfactory—and now to find that her most eloquent efforts had evoked only joy! The evening before she had suspected that her revenge had failed. Now she knew it.

June went to bed that night serene in spirit, and awoke to bright skies and the still, muffled quiet that follows a heavy snow-storm. Jim Albert had overestimated the duration of the blizzard.

Gertrude, quite characteristically, could scarcely restrain her joy at the prospect of leaving. Nor, truth to tell, could her hosts. She demanded the dogs and the sledge immediately after breakfast, but when Fleming Magregor discovered that she had no idea where the Stellar camp was, he demurred until Albert could reconnoitre.

About noon while the Indian was still away, there came a halloo from the lake and those in the cabin saw two strange men on snow-shoes approaching. Gertrude looked at them uncertainly a moment and then gave a shout of joy.

“Saved at last!” she cried, with unconscious naivete. “They’re guides from our camp!”

The men were almost as glad to see Gertrude as she to see them.

“Thank heaven we’ve found you!” said one, fervently. “Mr. Bergman’s wild. He’s had us out searching for you in the worst of the blizzard. We could hardly keep him from starting out himself.”

Though the man's voice was respectful, June could detect the resentment in it.

"Oh, Bergman!" laughed Gertrude. "I'd forgotten about him. I suppose he was rather cut up. It must have been funny."

The man checked his words but looked his surprise. He was a white trapper by the name of Adams, whom the Magregors knew. His companion was an Indian.

"Camp's only two miles away," he told the factor when he had renewed the acquaintance, "and, of course, we never thought to look anywhere as close as this. Didn't know anyone was here, in fact. When do you start down?"

"Tomorrow at dawn, Heaven willing!" declared Magregor. "And by the way, Ben," he added, "can you spare us a little grub from your camp? We're about down to the rind."

A peculiar look, half of concern, half of shame, crossed the other's face.

"Unless you're all out I can't—wouldn't dare," he replied earnestly, in a low voice. "Everything ain't quite right over there." He jerked his head significantly towards

camp. "I'm storekeeper for 'em, an' if I know anything, those fifty tourists are goin' to need help this winter. The men that out-fitted 'em must have been fools."

Magregor nodded in grave surprise. Things *must* be serious. The refusal of a grub-stake in winter was a rare thing.

"Oh, we'll make out all right," he said cheerfully. "Don't think anything more about it."

Gertrude made ready quickly. Rather than wait for the dogs she decided to tramp the two miles with the men.

"And besides," she said, "I guess Bergman *is* about wild. It would be a shame to keep him in misery any longer."

June who, since the arrival of the searching party, had heard nothing but Bergman, expressed her curiosity.

"Who is Bergman?" she asked. "Your director?"

"Nope. The owner of Stellar. He's wasting a lot of time up here when he ought to be in New York 'tending to business."

June was puzzled. Bergman's anxiety and

Gertrude's familiar contempt of one in his exalted position struck an unpleasant note. A vague, repellent wonder dawned in her mind.

When she stood ready to go, Gertrude led June a little to one side.

"I suppose I owe you a great deal, dearie," she said, "so if you ever come to New York, be sure and look me up. Meantime I suppose you will see Paul."

"Probably, if the Graphics haven't gone back," June replied imperturbably.

"Well, if you do," and the lady smiled sweetly, "tell him how you met his wife, and say that she loves him in the same old way. Also you might add that she still considers divorce a very sinful proceeding"—she laughed—"and that unfortunately her health remains exceptionally good."

It was a last desperate shot and it went home.

June turned away suddenly without replying, and Gertrude tingled with satisfaction. The two did not speak together again, and a few minutes later Miss Mackay left.

CHAPTER XX

THE WORM TURNS

THE Stellar Camp had been built beside one of the innumerable small streams that empty into Loon Lake. A confused group of raw log huts now buried to their windows in snow, it was partially sheltered from the wind by a steep cut bank and the spruce forest which crowned it.

An hour after leaving the Magregor cabin where Adams, the trapper, and his Indian had found her, Gertrude approached the camp. But the sight of it raised no anticipations of joyful home-coming or reunion in her mind. Though she had cried "Saved at last!" at sight of her rescuers, this huddle of buildings evoked no deeper emotions than the thought of needed physical comforts to be obtained, and the opportunity offered to impersonate the

surviving heroine of desperate adventures—a *rôle* she was carefully prepared to play.

And yet the camp stood there a monument to her whim!

Several months before, conscious of her increasing ascendancy over Bergman, Gertrude had sought her revenge on Paul, both for his material success and for what she supposed was his new love affair. Publicity stories emanating from Camp Graphic were whetting the public appetite for "A Wilderness Idyl," and its release promised to be an event in movie history.

The thought that her husband was about to add this new triumph to his already long list, crystallized Gertrude's jealous envy. She convinced Bergman that by rushing a company north at top speed and working fast, the Steller could release a northern film coincident with the Graphic feature which would greatly counteract its success.

Bergman, whose only unswerving allegiance was to the shapely dollar sign, could see the business possibilities in this suggestion. The

attempt would at least divide the public interest, and probably still the furore over the rival release.

In reward for her plan Gertrude received the leading female *rôle* in "A Magdalene of the Snows"—achieved stardom overnight. But even this promotion was not purely exuberant gratitude on Bergman's part. As he himself had predicted that hot September afternoon in the New York tango palace, the earlier films in which she had appeared had proved successful. For the first time Gertrude was becoming widely known.

Stellar's expedition into the wilds had set a record for speed and financial outlay, and these isolated, half-smothered huts were its sole visible result. Built without careful forethought for arrangement, they faced in all directions like blocks dropped by a careless hand. Even at a distance they gave an impression of faulty organization and ill-advised haste.

Drawing nearer, Gertrude's spirits did not rise. There were no signs of life except a

brown thread of wood-smoke against the blue sky, and the woman experienced a sharp disillusionment, a wretched discontent with it all. The tragedy of Gertrude's life was that, bringing no love or joy to anything, she found no love and gladness anywhere.

The return of the lost was signalled by her companions with a shrill whistle and waving of arms, and Gertrude, taking her cue, moved through the ensuing scenes of welcome with an off-hand depreciation of perils survived that showed careful rehearsal on the walk home. And yet she knew that her noisy reception was not genuinely joyous. These people were relieved that she was alive. That was all.

Bergman was not at camp, she learned, but had gone off with the southern searching party and would not be back until dark. Gertrude silently thanked heaven for the respite, and departed to her maid and her bath.

About four o'clock there was a jingle of bells and a dog-team dashed up to the accompaniment of men's shouts. A moment later there came an impatient knock at Gertrude's

door, and in response to her word, Bergman floundered in. He was in furs, and his hair, eyebrows, and moustache were covered with frost.

"Thank God they found you, Gertie!" he cried, with hoarse emotion. "I was afraid it was too late." He went towards her eagerly.

Her maid had gone, and she sat dressed in a rose-coloured tea-gown before a tray of tea and assorted pastry that had been placed on the rough table. She rose and held out her hands with a tired smile.

"I really believe you mean it, Al. It's rather nice to be missed, you great big bear, you. Oh, no! You mustn't touch me, you'll get me all wet."

He remembered the melting snow on his furs and moustache and restrained himself with an effort.

"Nice to be missed, Gert!" he groaned. "Gawd, I thought you was dead."

"I *have* been through a good deal," she admitted, plaintively, "but I'm like the bad penny. Some tea?"

Baffled by his reception, he turned hesitatingly away.

"No, I guess not. Now that you're safe, I suppose I'd better look after things. We got to have a conference. Durham's kickin' again, and so is Adams. It seems like it's nothin' but kicks here all the time." He stood a moment longer devouring her with his eyes. "Well, I guess you want to be alone, so I'll come in after dinner."

"All right, Al, whatever you say."

He left her, still baffled and a little hurt.

The heads of the Stellar enterprise gathered in what Bergman termed his office, a small, square room at the end of the cabin where the props were stored. Durham, the director, a small wiry man, bald-headed and wearing glasses, was there, as was Peters, the male lead, a hero well known for his romantic mop of hair and soulful eyes. Adams, who was in charge of the material needs of the camp, completed the group.

The director spoke first. He was falling farther and farther behind in his "takes"

because of lack of facilities, he complained. It looked now as if they would have to omit the big dog-team race, as there weren't enough dogs in camp, and none of the nearby trappers or Indians would loan or sell theirs at this time of year. Moreover, he had discovered that in the hurry of departure, a case of film had been left behind, and he was afraid of running short before he finished.

"Well, don't waste so much," Bergman said, testily. "You use fifty thousand feet to release six. I don't mind that in New York, but you can't do it here."

Durham threw his hands hopelessly into the air.

"How can I get effects without film? I must eliminate, add, retake. It's the art of the thing. I can't be held down like some tyro. I must have a free hand to develop my ideas. Besides, my people are discontented. How can I do anything under the circumstances?" He ceased with a look of despair.

Bergman growled and turned to Peters.

He represented the actors and actresses, he

said. They were perishing with cold. The cabins were badly built, and there were not enough stoves. There had been a miscalculation, evidently, in the number required, and what had come weren't properly distributed. Something must be done.

Recalling that each room of Gertrude's detached cabin had a stove, Bergman recognized the currents beneath the surface of this complaint. But he also realized with some compunction that too much had been asked of his company in plunging them into an almost arctic winter without opportunity for acclimatization. He promised Peters that he would try to remedy matters.

Adams succinctly stated that if the company expected to remain in the North as long as they had planned, there would have to be a drastic reform in the use of supplies.

"It ain't that you haven't got enough truck," he said, "but it ain't the right kind. That parleyvoo *chef* of yours uses up good flour makin' fancy do-dads that don't stay a man ten minutes. You're 'way short on

bacon an' beans an' the grub that you ought to have. Whoever outfitted you must have been a arm-chair explorer. If you expect to pull through, you'll have to begin to cut rations."

Peters, who had been listening, sharply interrupted with a toss of his mane to inquire if he would have to put up with starvation as well as freezing.

"You will if you don't cut down," Adams reiterated convincingly.

Bergman left the conference disgusted and discouraged. His chief resentment was with himself for having let his infatuation place him in this position—a fact which he had to admit. Under the pretence that this biggest of Stellar enterprises needed his personal attention, he had supervised every detail of preparation, and brought the company north, all as a cloak for his desire to be with Gertrude Temple.

As speed had been imperative if the Graphic triumph were to be minimized, the blunders of ignorance and haste had begun to show them-

selves, and the uncompromising, implacable, northern winter was taking full advantage of every one of them.

Now the unimagined possibility of failure stared him in the face. Disorganization and discontent reigned, *esprit de corps* was gone, and even his leaders seemed against him.

Dinner that night in the mess cabin was not a cheerful affair. Word had gone round of the results of the conference, and the gloom was impenetrable. It was plain to the majority that instead of conditions bettering they must grow worse, and an illuminating sidelight on the state of feeling was that Gertrude Mackay's safe return was scarcely mentioned during the meal. That lady herself, fatigued, it was assumed, by her experiences, did not appear, but had a tray sent in.

After dinner, smoking moodily, Bergman walked to her cabin. It had grown cold with the clearing of the storm, and the thermometer was nearing thirty degrees below zero. The stars sparkled with frosty brilliancy in a dull blue sky, and to the north there was a ceaseless

ghostly interplay of colours as the Aurora flicked its streamers up the heavens. On the river bank the husky dogs howled dismally at the display, and now and then some freezing tree expanded with the report of a rifle-shot.

In his mood, the interior of Gertrude's cabin grated on Bergman. Here everything to compel luxury amid desolation had been done. There were cushions, curtains, knick-knacks—even an easy chair; all demanded by the lady along with the *chef*, and brought at the expense of practical and necessary things. In the bedroom back of the thin partition, the toilet-table, with its coloured jars and bottles and silver-backed accessories, was a strange anomaly in its primitive setting.

Bergman sat down heavily on a plain pine chair, forgetful, to Gertrude's delight, of the proprietary kiss. He felt for the first time with a vague resentment that she was, in a way, back of all his troubles.

"Guess you'll have to kiss one of your stoves good-bye," he began gloomily. "Peters put

up an awful roar about the bunkhouses being cold this afternoon."

"H'm! I suppose he mentioned me!"
She bristled.

"No, he didn't have to."

She looked at him astonished. She had expected a different reply. Warm, satisfied, well-fed, like a cat she expected a stroking. Her ire increased.

"Well, Al, you certainly can't expect me, the leading woman of this company, to be robbed to make that false alarm comfortable."

In his hour of depression the man ardently longed for appreciation, encouragement, and sympathy, and Gertrude's crass self-assertion rasped him.

"Maybe he's a false alarm and maybe he ain't," he replied, testily. "Nobody ever tells me his eight hundred a week is a false alarm."

He, too, had blundered. Gertrude's chief hatred of the leading man rested on the fact that he received more money than she did.

"Why should they? You signed him on at that. Only a fool would have done it."

He nodded his head slowly while his swarthy face darkened under a slow tide of colour, and his little black eyes grew hard. The dead cigar drooped from the corner of his mouth.

"And only a fool would have come up here," he grated. "I know that now."

It was like a slap in the face, this blurted opinion of the Stellar wild-goose chase for which she was primarily responsible. She sat looking at him in astonishment and anger that for a moment were inarticulate. He seemed to have forgotten that only four hours ago she had been restored to him from the arms of death.

"So you're passing the buck to me, are you?" she finally managed in a voice as taut as a steel wire. "Because that pretty-boy's got cold feet, I'm to blame, eh?"

"Maybe you are and maybe you ain't," he said, doggedly. "Who thought of comin' up here in the first place? It wasn't me, was it? Who thought of gougin' the Graphics?"

"Well, you didn't have to do it," she flashed. "Nobody made you. You offered, didn't

you? What are you raisin' the devil with me for?" Her blue eyes seemed to emit sparks of fire, and her voice was strident.

"Yes, I offered," he retorted. "It was part of our bargain. You was to be a star at the head of your own company, and I made you a star. I kept my bargain as I said I would." The veins on his low forehead stood out. "But you haven't kept your bargain. You and me were to hit it off when you were made, but every time I try to talk to you I get the icy mitt. Do you call that fair? What do you think I come up here for anyway? To see the snow? To hear Durham belly-ache about art?"

He leaned towards her, his pudgy hands clenched on his knees. Swiftly, unpremeditatedly, his moment of depression striking the flint of her selfishness had flashed new fire into the tinder of long-smouldering resentments and injustices. Put off with flimsy excuses, evaded with open daring, he had for weeks been unconsciously preparing for this time. Now that it was upon him, he had gone too

far to draw back. He rushed on without giving her a chance to speak, watching her passion-contorted face unwinkingly.

"I never handed you any bum poetry, or bunk about platonic love. You and I understood each other from the first. And I don't blame no woman for getting what she can out of the game—I never knew one yet that didn't, married or single. But I'll tell you this much, Gert, a bargain's a bargain, and a woman that don't live up to one is the lowest woman there is, bar none."

She started to speak but he checked her with a wave of his hand.

"I love you, Gert, and I have since the first day I saw you. I'm willin' to give you everything I can and do everything for you, but I expect you to do your end. I don't ask much, only a little love and sympathy and understanding. What good is a woman to a man if she don't give him them things?"

He stopped abruptly, leaving her breathless and unprepared. For an instant the remembrance flashed upon her that those were just

the things Paul Temple had so often asked in vain, and the realization came that even in such a relationship as this gross Jew had offered, men sought something of a woman a little higher, a little nobler than merely gratified desire.

Then ethical considerations were swept away on a torrent of fury.

“Love me!” she laughed, with shrill, mirthless scorn. “You love me a lot, you do! This looks like it, don’t it, coming in here and trying to blame me because things have gone wrong. Here I am, not four hours back from my grave for all you knew, and you’re just layin’ on the love thick, you are! Insulting me, and treating me as if I was some fresh extra girl!”

The thought of her recent hardships, and the bitter injustice of it all struck a resounding chord of self-pity. She dabbed her eyes with her handkerchief.

“Little you know what I’ve been through, and little you care! For two days I’ve almost starved. I haven’t had my clothes off, or

had a night's rest; and now you blame me because I was willing to come up to this God-forsaken snow-drift to take a picture that ought to make Stellar the biggest thing in the world. And you talk about my not keepin' my bargain. Gawd! haven't I done everything I could, give my life, almost?" She was frankly weeping by this time, but watching him nevertheless.

Bergman, squatting like a frog on his hard chair, waited stolidly until she had finished. His features had not changed their expression, but now as he spoke there was ugly determination in his voice.

"All right, Gert. You've had your say and I've had mine. You're dodgin' again, like you've always done, but you can't get away with it this time. I've put up with all I'm goin' to. I've done my share, and I'm goin' to collect. That's all for tonight, but tomorrow I'm goin' to find out where you stand."

He rose abruptly, shifting his chewed cigar from one corner of his mouth to the other, and stood looking down upon her with that de-

tached consideration which Gertrude had learned to associate with his business operations.

"I ain't goin' to argue with you," he concluded, "because there's nothin' to argue about. You made a bargain, an' the question is, are you goin' to keep it, or ain't you? You can think things over tonight and I'll come around again in the morning to find out where we stand."

He spoke with a disconcerting finality that robbed the woman for a moment of speech. Then turning away, he calmly lifted his outer garments from the nail where they hung, opened the door, and went out.

CHAPTER XXI

AN UNWELCOME GUEST

FOR a moment after he had gone Gertrude Temple sat, a graven image of amazement, her handkerchief half-way to her eyes, her lips parted as if about to speak. Her sobs had automatically ceased when the door closed, and now gradually a look that was part defiance and part fear overspread her face.

With that resounding departure the whole aspect of her life had changed. She confronted an unprecedented situation. Bergman's ultimatum had precipitated a crisis, had swept aside her carefully laid plans. Successful until now in holding him off, she had counted on doing so until she really became famous, when she meant to attach him, awed and harmless, to her train. And now he had ruined everything.

"Oh, the black beast! I hate him!" she panted, crushing her ball of moist handkerchief in one palm. And yet, angry as she was, she thought clearly and coolly.

A woman of mediocre talent who had lived by her wits since leaving her husband, she had studied men, and while learning their management had acquired the art of extracting the most from them while giving the least. But never before had her victim revolted—an unflattering reflection on her skill in the present case.

Knowing Bergman as she did, she admitted the seriousness of this crisis. Placid, stolid, easy-going, he was good-tempered until aroused; then inflexible. Having spoken as he did tonight, she knew he would not go back. Similar but less intense scenes between them in the past had ended in his humility and capitulation, but this one would not, she knew. She had witnessed the wreaking of his purpose upon others. He was adamant.

This in itself was disconcerting enough, but it was made more so by the peculiar char-

acter of her natural surroundings. Hemmed in on every side by snow-smothered leagues of wilderness, she realized that she was completely in his power. The wiles and subterfuges of crowded Manhattan would avail her nothing here, and suddenly she felt helpless, desperate, like a trapped animal.

Particularly appalling was the thought that, after all, Bergman was right, that his accusations were true. She *had* suggested the Stellar expedition, and she had *not* kept her bargain. She could not evade those two facts. Yet she did not intend to surrender; she revolted at the thought of compulsion. In her determination she sought wildly for any loophole of escape, but she could find none. Bergman was too clearly in the right and she in the wrong. . . .

That night her life seemed very bitter and unjust to Gertrude. And to make matters worse, she commenced recalling the doubly hateful details of Paul's successful work and comparative happiness as June had revealed them. She contrasted this desolate, badly

managed camp with the smart, efficient organization farther south, and the spirit of accomplishment and mutual helpfulness reigning there with its reverse here. And the old savage envy gnawed again at her soul.

But the keenest spur was the thought that Paul loved someone else. A second romance had come into his life at the very time when her own soiled and tawdry episode with Bergman had reached its end. He had everything and she had nothing!

She burst into tears of anger and self-pity, and let them have their way with her awhile. Then drying her eyes she returned to the old wearisome game of contrivance by which she lived. What course of action would yield the most now?

The morning after the clearing of the storm, June and Jim Albert were up before dawn. Though intensely cold the bright stars augured fair weather, and preparations for the start went on swiftly.

June cooked a meagre breakfast while Jim

loaded the sledge. The dogs, whose daily ration of dried fish had also suffered decrease, were gaunt and wolfish. Scentsing food, they crowded determinedly about the sledge until Jim had to drive them off with his long whip. One successful snatch of those white fangs, and the party's predicament would indeed be serious.

Fleming Magregor, of course, was a helpless burden upon the party and must ride the entire distance. His broken leg, set between splints skilfully shaped by the Indian's hunting knife, was knitting satisfactorily, but to touch the foot to the ground was out of the question. The long, jarring, straining journey would in itself be tax enough.

Dawn was a faint white glow in the southeastern sky when all was ready. The ghostly, snow-laden trees stood motionless in the still air. The wide expanse of the lake looked like steel. There was no sound except an occasional mysterious snapping in the forest depths. The breaths of dogs and men were clouds of white vapour which froze in frosty rime on furs and shaggy coats.

June had turned back to the cabin for a last inspection when she observed a human figure coming along the shore of the lake towards her. Surprised and curious, she waited. A moment later, with a shock of astonishment, she recognized Gertrude Temple, wearing snowshoes and carrying some object in her hand.

In silence the other approached, and when she reached the girl, set an alligator leather handbag down on the snow beside her.

“Good morning, scholars,” she said, cheerfully. “I guess you weren’t expecting me, but thank Heaven, I got here in time.”

June’s amazement increased. “I don’t quite understand,” she said, blankly, “did you come to see me—us—for any reason?”

“I sure did. I want to go south with you, so I came over. Do you get up as early as this every morning? Lord!” She yawned with fervour and abandon, her arms outstretched, her small mouth frankly wide. June noticed that she was dressed in the rich and costly furs of their former meeting.

Had she gaily tossed a dynamite bomb in

their midst she could have created no more havoc than did this announcement. June stood speechless, aghast, trying to realize that she had heard aright.

“Well, we hardly—I—you——”

“What is it, June?” asked her father, a little sharply, from the sledge where he sat propped up against the duffle.

The girl motioned her companion, and together they walked towards him.

“It’s Miss Mackay,” June explained. “She has come over from her camp and wants us to take her south with us.”

The factor’s jaw dropped as he stared his incredulity.

“Take her south with us!”

“Yes,” Gertrude interposed, eagerly, in her own behalf. “You see, Mr. Magregor, I heard you say yesterday you were starting for Fort McLeod this morning, so when—certain things—happened as they did—I decided I would like to go along. There really isn’t any other way for me to go, is there?”

“But why should ye go at all, ma’am?”

Magregor inquired, bluntly. "This is no time for you to be leavin' here and travellin' in the dead of winter."

"Oh, but you don't understand. I *must* go. I wouldn't think of it if there was anything else to do, but——"

"Why? I don't understand this." He was frankly ill-pleased.

"Oh, because," she burst out, "I'm going south to my husband where I belong."

"Your *husband!*" He almost shouted the words. "I didn't know ye had a husband. Ye call yourself Miss Mackay!"

"Yes, I do. That was my name before I was married and I use it on the stage." In her anxiety to explain, to win his consent, her usual impudent lightness was gone.

"But how can we take you to your husband? He certainly can't be where we're going."

"Oh yes, he is. He's at the Graphic Camp. Paul Temple is my husband."

"Paul Temple!" For a moment he was helpless beneath the shock of the revelation. Then he tried to adjust his ideas to it. Its

deeper significance in their lives found expression in an involuntary glance towards June. The factor had not been blind during the months of Paul's association with his daughter, but he had trustfully bided his time, knowing that when the moment came June would tell him what there was to tell. Now her face, white and pinched in the frame of its parka, verified his fears. The instinctive, murderous rage against Paul shook him by the throat but he fought it down, remembering the main issue. This woman wanted to go south with them.

"Mrs. Temple," he said, evenly, "you mustn't think of going with us. We haven't room for you. Besides, your work is here, isn't it? How can ye leave that?"

"If you're playing the lead in this picture, how will they be able to finish it if you go?" asked June unexpectedly, her voice hard and challenging.

Gertrude flashed her a glance of fury. The knowledge of opposition from this quarter only served to harden her determination. Yet the question was not an easy one to answer.

Possessed of a contract with Bergman so favourable to herself that she was willing to chance his suit, yet she knew better than to offer such ethics to her interlocutors. She was spared a reply by the factor, who, having thought deeply, spoke again.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Temple," he said, "but ye can't come with us, ye couldn't stand it. Ye've travelled little in the North, I'm thinkin', and we're goin' to travel hard. It'll be cruel on us who have done it all our lives, but it would kill you. You're not fit. You'd only hold us back, and I'm drag enough as it is."

Jim Albert, who stood impatiently nearby, spoke sharply to the dogs which, restless and eager to be off, were tugging tentatively at the traces and sitting down again perplexed. The day was growing; the dead white light in the east had given place to a crimson that was gradually staining snow and sky.

"Oh, but I promise to keep up, not to complain," Gertrude begged, earnestly. The possibility of refusal had not seriously occurred

to her, and now it was unthinkable. Not only would she be forced back to face Bergman, but the treachery of her attempted flight would become known.

"Na doot ye mean well," said the factor, "and would try, but that isn't all, Mrs. Temple. There's the grub to think of. We've none to spare; we're verra short for the three of us, let alone anyone else. I tried to buy some from Adams yesterday, but he couldn't spare any. Ye're not used to that sort of thing, Mrs. Temple. Ye couldn't stand it."

Gertrude's anxious face brightened with swift relief.

"Oh, I thought of that," she cried. "I knew you were short and brought my own food." She pointed to the sack she had set down on the snow when she had first approached June.

Things seemed at a deadlock. The woman was unconquerable. Accepting every condition gladly, there seemed no really valid excuse for refusing her further. But the factor was determined.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Temple," he repeated with finality, "but you can't go with us. Ye'll forgive my bluntness, but it's impossible. However, if there's any message we can take to Mr. Temple, tell me—or perhaps there's a letter. I promise to deliver it to him myself. Now go back to your camp and think no more about this. At any other time or in other circumstances we would have been glad to have you, but not now."

He had asked the thing she could not, would not do. Gertrude saw defeat staring her in the face, and the thought of all it involved whipped her to a last effort. She burst into well-nigh hysterical tears, all the time desperately seeking some way to turn her failure into triumph. Then the evil inspiration came, and she deliberately lied.

"You've *got* to take me," she sobbed, "you can't do anything else. Y-you asked me about the picture and I wouldn't tell you at first, b-but now I will. Last night I had an awful row with Bergman, our owner, b-because I got lost in the storm and he told me to get

out—d-didn't want me there any longer. He said he was g-going to give my part to some-one else, and that he was done with me, the b-black beast!"

Her tears strangled her for a moment, but presently she rushed on.

"I knew he m-meant it, but where was I to go? Then I thought of my husband, of P-Paul. Who else could I go to? Who else ought to take care of me? I—I knew you were starting south and would see him, and what other way was there for me to get to him than go with you? I can't go back to the camp, Mr. Magregor, and if you leave without me, what'll I do? I've no one else to turn to. You can't leave me here to die!" The last words were a wail of despair.

Obviously, Magregor could not leave her here to die. None knew that better than he. Her ultimate appeal did not fall on deaf ears. And yet he did not want her. He thought of driving to the Stellar Camp and trying to patch up matters between this woman and her persecutors. But that meant delay,

perhaps another day of it, and they had wasted enough time already.

As if for advice he looked to June, who throughout the whole colloquy had stood silent and motionless. She met his glance with one of utter defeat.

"I think we had better take Mrs. Temple with us," she said in a dead, colourless voice.

"Oh, thank you, dearie, you *are* my friend," cried the other plaintively as she dried her tears.

Magregor glanced at his watch. Already the sun hung a pale red ball above the woods on the far shore of the lake.

"Under the circumstances I can't refuse ye, Mrs. Temple," he said, ungraciously. "Jim, throw that bag on here and get started. We've lost an hour already."

CHAPTER XXII

THE FIRST STOP

THE crossing of Loon Lake soon revealed the nature of the work before them. The new snow lay two feet deep and was as loose and shifting as sand, the intense cold having prevented the gritty flakes from melting to form a frozen crust. Magregor had deliberately waited until this morning to start in the hope that the sun of the afternoon before would effect a change so well worth the delay, but the sudden drop in temperature had defeated him.

Now the going was heavy. Under the factor's weight the sledge sunk deep and the dogs floundered and slipped through the elusive footing. Jim Albert tramping ahead, tried to pack some sort of trail with his broad snow-shoes but accomplished little.

However, the lake offered luxury compared with the travelling they found in the forest beyond the southern shore. Here among the spruces and jack-pines there was no level, open surface, but a rough and ready country of gullies, muskeg swamps, and hills. It was deep woods work and bristled with obstacles,—abrupt declivities, protruding tree limbs, submerged stumps and boulders. And for all their careful driving, the sledge heaved and careened until the factor groaned in agony. Here they moved through a windlessness as complete as chaos must have been before the Word. But Creation had come, white and undulating, and across its blind face the slim tree trunks cast straight blue shadows.

And yet life still pulsed tenuously in this wilderness of death. Whiskey-jacks scolded from tree-tops, and snow-buntings and grosbeaks hopped about in search of food. Squirrels, too, ventured curiously from their snug holes, and once the sledge crossed a wind-protected spot where caribou had yarded up.

June and Gertrude trudged abreast on op-

posite sides of the gee-pole, silent at first in the constraint of their re-association. But as the minutes passed, the girl made crisp suggestions; showed the other how to use her snowshoes with less effort and more comfort; warned her to loosen her furs at the throat when she grew warm, to prevent overheating; told her to breathe through the nose and talk little in fear of the action of great cold upon the tissues of the lungs, which results in a swift and fatal pneumonia.

Gertrude trudged resolutely. If ever in a pampered and ease-loving life she had determined to accomplish a purpose, it was now. Warned in advance of the hardships to be expected, she faced them doggedly. Aware that her presence in the party was unwelcome, and that she had forced its acceptance with deceit, she realized that she could look for neither help nor sympathy from the Magregors.

In moments when the thrashing gee-pole did not claim all her attention, June thought with dull passivity of the future. What would be the effect on their lives of this

woman's arrival at Graphic Camp? At least it would swiftly and finally end her suspense and pain, she conceded—a barren comfort.

Mainly her thoughts were not for herself, but for the man she loved. June's own experiences with Gertrude had revealed the hidden tragedy of Paul's life even while they had restored her faith in his fundamental honour, and she could understand now the moments of dark depression that had gripped him so often during their early acquaintance. And this woman would reopen and continue that volume of his life that he had closed forever!

She imagined Gertrude's descent upon the camp, and with a kind of prophetic vision saw her moving through its busy harmony like an embodied Discontent, the inevitable foam of trouble seething in her wake.

And what would it all bring to June herself? She did not know, but she faced the event with a courage strong with faith and hope, and most of all, love. Life presented a bitter and inexplicable aspect to her that day, strangely different from the innocent, girlish face of six

months before, so far had she travelled and so much had she lived since then.

Gertrude, because speech was dangerous, had to be content with pluming herself silently upon her success. During that long night vigil in the Stellar Camp, she had earnestly sought the course of action which would yield her the most, and had finally decided that it lay in return to her husband. Her recent defeat of the Magregors added much to her satisfaction.

These matters occupied her thoughts for the first hour. Then, panting after a long, heavy climb she paused for breath on the crest of a hill. Instantly the sledge had glided past her and she was in its wake with distance steadily widening between them. Jim, the dogs, and June went on without an instant's pause. Steadily, monotonously, without haste, they pushed on at their unchanging pace, a pace that, though it held something in reserve, ate up the miles like the lope of a wolf. They could and would maintain this pace for days.

Gertrude ran a few yards to catch up again. Then she noticed that the snow behind the

sledge was smoother and harder-packed than the unbroken trail beside the gee-pole, and did not push up to her former position. But even here she was breathing hard and glowing with the violent exercise.

Presently muscles long unused commenced to send out their first signals of distress. Her snow-shoes occasionally crossed, causing her to stumble. A particularly careless step and she fell prone, but the next instant was up, with a laughing sally at her clumsiness.

The others apparently had not heard. Already they were ten yards ahead. No one had hesitated—had even looked around. On they went, doggedly, at that steady, killing pace.

As she ran again to overtake them, Gertrude experienced a flash of anger. Didn't they know she wasn't used to this sort of thing? They might at least make allowances! Then she recalled her difficult position and, setting her teeth, plodded on.

At last, when she felt that she must rest or fall down in her tracks, the factor looked at

his watch and spoke sharply to the dogs. They halted at once, and Jim Albert turned back for the first time since the start. Evidently it was noon. The Indian at once commenced to chop wood for the fire while June loosened the pack on the sledge. Gertrude, arriving a few seconds after the halt, summoned a smile and sank down in the snow beside the sledge, too tired to speak.

"Only half an hour," said the factor. "We don't make much headway in this going." Then, turning to his guest with perfunctory courtesy, "Feeling all right, Mrs. Temple?"

"Oh, fine!" she replied, gallantly. Then, faint with the mortal hunger that accompanied her exhaustion, suggested: "But say, don't you want to use some of the grub I brought? You might find it a kind of a change."

Magregor hesitated.

"Why,—yes," he acceded, "though we haven't time to eat much. June, ye might open that bag."

The girl untied the string at the neck, and

reaching in her hand pulled out an object at which she stared in perplexed wonder: It was a can wrapped in fancy paper, upon which one significant word stood out boldly. It was

TRUFFLES

June sat rigid for an instant, undecided whether to laugh or cry, the thing was so hopeless and yet so characteristic. Gertrude watched her in pleased expectancy.

Then the girl tried again, and this time brought out a bottle of olives, the liquor of which had frozen and burst the glass.

An awful silence fell as she proceeded to empty the sack. Worthless article after worthless article followed until at the end the only supplies of any value were a loaf of bread and two tins of meat. Obviously, at the first chance Gertrude had done her best to enlarge the poverty-stricken diet of her benefactors.

Magregor, only too well aware of what this pitiful display meant to them all, did not speak for a moment. Then he said in an even voice:

“Throw all that stuff away except the bread and meat. I’m afraid of it, and it weighs too much even to carry. And Jim, this cuts us down so much we can’t eat this noon. Boil tea.”

CHAPTER XXIII

LOVE WATCHES

CAMP GRAPHIC could scarcely contain itself that morning. Tom Briscoe, rising in his place at breakfast, had announced that the end was in sight, that another week would finish the work and conclude this Siberian exile. Then for New York! The instant's breathless silence that had greeted the words was ended by a roof-lifting yell during which Goldie Burke commenced to weep into her corn-meal mush.

"I could marry that man!" she sobbed, almost unbalanced by joy, a fact she admitted later when taxed with her words. "Oh, Lord! to see the Big Light again and hear the Big Noise! There'll be little things on wheels to ride in, an' food to eat, an' places to go. Nothing I've got but my union suits will be in

style, but I don't care. They can dress me up like an orphan if they'll only let me see an afternoon extry, an' watch the crowds on Broadway after the Saturday matunnay. I could die happy suffocated with gasoline on Fifth Avenoo!"

This picture proved too touching, and fresh tears rolled down to the end of her reddened nose.

Elsie Tanner on her right, sympathized mechanically, but her soft eyes were dark with pain. These had been happy weeks for her. Because she was near to Paul, thrown into the unavoidable intimacy of the camp, she had found his cheery, friendly indifference a bitter-sweet comfort. And now it must end. With a break-up would come separation, and the starved pleasure of occasional studio meetings. She wished bitterly that some great blizzard would come and snow them in forever.

Baillie, seated near a window at one of the long tables, greeted the announcement with mingled emotions. From one standpoint he could not get back to New York soon enough.

Realizing his defeat here, he wanted matters ended at once, and a new hand dealt all round. Yet he awaited eagerly June's return. He only desired one thing now: to see her face as she read the letter from Paul's wife he had stolen that day of his confinement to the bunk-house.

As time passed, his infatuation for June, thwarted of fulfilment, had cooled suddenly and completely, as such feelings do. He wondered how he could have lost his head so over "that ignorant little backwoods hick."

"Lord," he thought sometimes, "if I'd ever flashed that on New York, the town would have split its sides laughing!"

Now he only asked revenge, and he would call the incident closed. His smarting pride and self-esteem demanded assuagement; to hurt June in her turn and see her writhe. And incidentally to rowel Temple to the very vitals. His one uneasiness was that Temple would discover the loss of the letter before he could use it. But that was a chance he had to take, so he thought no more about it.

But Temple's mind was on other things than rummaging in trunks and mooning over his wife's letters. In fact he never thought of Gertrude except in connection with the confession he must make when June returned. He was too busy. "A Wilderness Idyl" was finished, and the company was uniting in a final spurt to clear up the short stuff Briscoe had laid out. Three small companies were at work simultaneously, two of them with promising minor people in the leads—an example of Briscoe's methods to inspire loyalty and ambition—and the company would return with enough snow stuff to vary the regular Graphic program for a year. Paul himself both directed and acted.

Briscoe's announcement had startled Paul a little. It brought home to him concretely the realization of how little time remained for him to settle the great problem of his life. He and June must understand each other finally before he left the North. Whether the company moved out on the day specified or not, he knew he would not go until he had seen her.

Today her continued absence worried him. It was the tenth day since her departure, and she had told him that with ordinary luck the journey to rescue her father should not take more than seven. Crushing down a natural anxiety, Paul had managed to lose himself in his work and pass that week. Then on the eighth day, hearing nothing, he had gone down to Fort McLeod to interview the Indians.

Maria and old Hawkbill her husband had reassured him: no reason to worry yet; with Jim and Missy nothing could happen to the factor; though their plans should miscarry, yet they could meet any emergency that might arise; they knew the country and the necessities of winter travel too well; still, if they hadn't come in three or four days, there might be some cause for uneasiness.

This was the third day and Paul was anxious. Owing to the fact that the weather at Camp Graphic had been uniformly good except for a few cloudy days and a flurry of snow, he could not imagine what had delayed the travellers

except an accident. He determined to visit the Fort again at once.

Committing a sort of treason, he dismissed his company in mid-afternoon, and tramped the two miles on snow-shoes with steadily increasing apprehension. He found the Hudson's Bay post with paths cleared and fires burning, and both Indians in the big warm kitchen. At the first mention of the matter that had brought him, he found a response to his uneasy mood.

'Gone too long," admitted John Hawkbill, shaking his head. "Afraid now mebbe something happen. Big storms there." He indicated the north.

"But Ju—Miss Magregor took plenty of grub."

"No grub plenty this country."

Temple was greatly disturbed.

"Well, what can we do? We must do something."

"If they not come today, start men after 'em."

Temple thought.

"Can you go? Have you got a good dog-team here?" he asked.

The other grunted. "Young dogs. Not much good. It would take two days to round up trappers to go with him," he added.

Paul exclaimed sharply. This would not do at all. From that moment he forgot everything except June's possible peril. He paced the low, smoke-stained kitchen for a minute. Then he spoke with new decision.

"We've got a dog-team at the camp, two of them, and good ones," he said, and recalled that the animals would not be needed in the remaining pictures. "We've got a sledge and young Peter to drive them. I'm going to start north after Miss Magregor and the factor tomorrow morning. Have you got plenty of grub here?"

"Yes."

"All right. I'll see how we're fixed at camp and if we need any we'll call on you."

A look of relief passed over the Indian's leathery face.

"But mebbe they come tonight," he suggested.

"I've thought of that. We'll start at dawn tomorrow and drive here. If you haven't heard anything—Jim Albert might come on ahead, you know,—we'll go right on. And we can take on your grub if we need it. Have it ready, will you? And some extra blankets and a flask of whiskey?"

Hawkbill assented.

Temple at once returned to camp, his mind haunted by torturing pictures. He imagined June starving or hurt, lying helpless, perhaps, in some bleak shelter, wondering in her pain why he did not come. He pictured the little party fighting for their lives with the great grey timber wolves, whose weird ululations he had heard sometimes at night as a travelling pack swept by in the distance. Such things were not unheard-of. Pierre, the wood-cutter at camp, had ghastly tales to tell of trappers' clean bones discovered in the spring after the snow had gone.

It was dark when he arrived, and he went

directly to the "office" where a light told him that Briscoe was at work. The director was seated before his cheap table, tabulating the results of the day's work, and looked up sharply from under a green eyeshade at the other's entrance.

"Hullo, Paul!" A moment's stare. "What's the matter? Seen a ghost?"

"No."

Temple closed the door and probed the shadows quickly for a chance visitor. Then he told what had transpired that afternoon and the action he had promised.

Briscoe listened with more than casual interest. He had not forgotten that unmentioned visit of his to Fort McLeod when he had offered to make June great under his direction. Though she had put him off then, and had given no definite answer since, he still clung to the idea tenaciously. At the top of his profession, with fame and fortune assured, it was still his ambition to cause one supreme star to swim into the dramatic firmament, to "discover" a great artist.

Whether June was of the requisite calibre, he did not know, but intuition urged him to make the trial, and therein lay his present interest in Paul's narrative.

But one thing made him scowl as the story went on; that was Temple's obvious love for June. No influence that played upon his people annoyed Briscoe as did "this love business." And if he were to make anything of June, this fol-de-rol must be forgotten. Give him a year in which this girl should be his, to do with absolutely as he would, and he would abide by the public's decision. But in that year there must be no love, no interest outside of work and himself. This was his dream as Paul told of the relief expedition he had promised, and it was characteristic of him that while June might be dying by inches in the wilderness he was living in the glory of his great ambition.

"What?" he stammered, vaguely, when the other ended. "Oh, yes, sure you did right to offer the sledge and dogs. Sure! Couldn't in decency do anything else. But they'll

have to supply the grub." He got up from the table, a thick, square chunk of a man, and commenced striding up and down the confined space with that intense energy that never left him even after a twenty-hour day's work.

"Of course you'll go?" he shot out.

"Yes."

"Who'll you take with you?"

"Peter, the Indian dog-trainer, and Welch, one of the trappers."

"They figure the Magregors are in a tight place?"

"Yes; something must have happened or they would have got back by this time."

"H'm!" Briscoe walked up and down, and presently his eyes lighted. "Starving maybe," he mused, eagerly, "falling down one by one, but fighting on because the spark of life won't die; famished dogs, and the old factor lyin' there communin' with his Presbyterian soul. Great! Great!"

Paul looked at him murderously. For the first time in their long association he longed to get his hands on that thick bull-neck.

"Gad, I'll do it!" shouted the director. "Gene Perkins and his camera go with you. If he gets some good realistic stuff we can use it for the punch of a one-reel thriller, and whip the rest of it into shape before we start home, even if we have to stay over another day. Let's see—what can we have for a story? H'm! H'm! . . . By thunder, how's this for a situation!"

"Everything's all right. We go then?" Paul interrupted him.

"Yes, yes, go to hell," snarled the big man in the throes of inspiration, and Paul hurried out.

The next morning at dawn they started; Peter, Welch, Temple, and Perkins, with an eight-dog team. No one except the cooks watched them go, for Paul had made a secret of the journey. At McLeod, Maria and John were waiting with the supplies packed. They had heard no word since the afternoon before; no one had come.

While the sledge was being loaded they discussed routes. Jim Albert had outlined to

Maria his approximate trail home, on the day of his arrival with news of the factor's injury, but there was no certainty that he would follow it exactly now. Even should he do so, those going north could not be sure of meeting him. The parties might camp within half a mile of each other and be unaware of the fact, unless one crossed the other's trails. On the other hand, Peter and Welch knew the country well and could not go far wrong.

"All ready?" said Paul at last. "Get off that sledge, Perkins." The languid one had taken part neither in the loading or the discussion. He arose with a reproachful look.

"All ready," returned Welch in his place ahead of the dogs.

Peter cracked his whip and they were off.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE BITTER TRAIL

JIM ALBERT knelt beside the inert body on the snow and shook it, rolling it back and forth. And as he rolled, he spoke, repeating the same words over and over.

“Grub ready; we go now; hurry up.”

It was the black hour before dawn. The burdened trees that stood motionless about the little clearing were illumined fitfully by the camp-fire. Above, the stars coruscated like diamonds through an atmosphere that seemed as clear and cold as the interstellar ether itself. By the fire June knelt cooking something in a skillet. A tin tea-pot balanced crazily on two stones nearby, and the factor, his face strangely livid and expressionless, reclined against a tree.

Steadily Jim rolled the inert body.

At last there came a faint sound, and he ceased, to look down into a pair of glazed eyes, open but uncomprehending.

“Grub ready; we go now; get up.”

Again the sound. Then the eyes cleared gradually and Gertrude tried to move. But she lay helpless as if cast in some mould, only the heaving of her chest revealing the intensity of her effort.

“Gawd!” she gasped. “Help me, can’t you!”

Obediently Jim Albert loosened the sleeping-bag and raised her to a sitting posture where she remained a few moments panting. The famished dogs, running about the circle of firelight, their eyes on the hissing skillet, caused spokes of shadow to revolve among the trees. With the Indian’s help Gertrude struggled to her feet. Her furs were torn and dirty, her wasted face dark with grime and exhaustion. Great shadows encircled her heavy eyes, and a frowsy strand of discoloured hair protruded from her parka.

“Breakfast’s ready.”

June poured out the re-steepings of last night's tea-leaves, and served the pitiful portions of food, after which she carried her father's share to him.

Gertrude made her way towards the fire with stiff, mechanical movements, dragging her feet across the snow. At the smell of cooking her eyes gleamed, and she whimpered with eagerness as June held out her plate. But a sudden savagery leaped from her like a darting flame when she saw what it contained.

"You devil!" she snarled, between parched lips. "Think I don't know you're trying to kill me! Because I'm weak. . . . The three of you against me! . . . "

June turned away, and neither of the others spoke. For three days, numb and helpless, they had seen first the rebellion, and then the breakdown of Gertrude Temple. This was the morning of the fourth day, and because of her, they were little more than half-way to Fort McLeod. Unanswered, communing bitterly with herself, Gertrude wolfed the food and threw the plate to the ground.

While Jim got the dogs into harness, June washed the dishes, rolled up the sleeping-things, and packed the sledge. Then the two lifted Fleming Magregor aboard and turned to Gertrude. She stood waiting, supporting herself against a tree trunk.

Nothing was said. Jim Albert mushed on the dogs and the haggard procession started. There was no barking or leaping against the traces now; the dogs' heads swung low and their bushy tails drooped. Their little bells tinkled on with stupid gaiety. The Indian did not go ahead now, but walked by the gee-pole. June plodded behind, and Gertrude followed as best she could.

Once clear of camp, Jim Albert found better going. The day before a Chinook had blown from the west causing a surface thaw, and the night cold had frozen a snow-crust that bore the sledge and those afoot. They would go faster with this help.

With June hanging to the tail-rope, the sledge skidded down a bank to the level, snow-covered surface of a frozen stream and the

dogs stepped out more briskly. June looked behind her. Gertrude, walking mechanically down the treacherous incline, slipped and fell. She fell unresistingly like a child that is learning to walk. Then after a moment she got up again with difficulty and came on. There was something uncanny, somnambulistic in her progress. She moved with eyes staring ahead, arms hanging at her sides, legs moving slowly like a machine that is running down.

June's work with the sledge required all her strength and attention in the woods, but on open stretches such as this she could give a little time to Gertrude. Now she returned and thrust a steadying hand under the other's arm.

But Gertrude flung her off.

"Let me alone," she said, thickly. "I don't want your help."

"But we'll get there so much quicker if we go faster," June explained with monotonous patience. Gertrude commenced to cry.

Later when they left the river June returned to the sledge, but Gertrude could not climb

the steep bank, and both she and Jim had to help her.

For an hour she struggled along, her face bearing the unmistakable signs of approaching exhaustion, eyes half-closed, cheeks drawn, mouth open.

"Oh, I'm sorry for her," said the factor, who chafed and raged at his forced inactivity, "but she *would* come. An' the worst is she's not only killing herself but she's killing us. But for her we'd have been home by now."

It was the truth, and Gertrude seemed to realize it. Nothing else could account for the incredible fortitude with which she forced herself along. And yet there was something else, and she revealed it another time when June tried to help her.

"I *will* get to him," she had panted, with feverishly blazing eyes. "What are you helping me for? Where are you taking me? *You shan't have him, I tell you!*"

Gradually she commenced to fall back. At the end of half an hour she was a quarter of a mile behind. Jim halted the dogs and they

all waited. There was nothing else to do. They could not turn back. Jim's route, while the shortest, led away from the usual winter trails, and their chance of encountering a traveller was small. To deviate now to some trapper's cabin only to find that he had left for more favourable grounds would be taking too great a risk. Only one course lay open to them—to fight on.

When Gertrude came up at last they waited a few precious minutes longer and then started the dogs. Now they entered a region across which fire had swept in a wave twenty miles wide. Bare, blackened tree trunks protruded from the snow. There was nothing else, no undergrowth or signs of life; it was a country of absolute death where Jim Albert knew his daily wide circuit in search of game would be futile.

It had proved futile every other day, except for a rabbit or two, for year by year the good game country moved farther north, and this region was thinning fast. Jim's hope was for a chance-found herd of caribou or moose,

pawing for moss beneath the snow of the muskeg barrens, but the one time he had sighted such a herd the animals had fled before he could get within range.

As time passed, the waits for Gertrude became more frequent, and longer. Through it all she remained mute, like some tortured animal, struggling forward with sharp, panting breaths that sounded harsh in the surrounding stillness. Then about ten o'clock she fell, and when the others set her on her feet, could not walk, but fell again, helplessly.

June and Jim Albert looked at each other, startled. This point of collapse had been reached every day of the journey except the first, and each time at an earlier hour, but always in the afternoon. The writing in the sky was growing plainer. The two half-dragged, half-carried Gertrude to the sledge, and carefully shifting the factor, crowded her in beside him. Then, taking ropes attached one on each side, they called on the dogs. The animals strained at their double load,

and with the other two tugging like draft horses at the ropes, they went on.

On level stretches they made good progress, but in the rough going of the woods, the crust was not strong enough to support such weight, and the runners broke through first on one side and then on the other. Then, as if it had been a mired vehicle, the two afoot would manoeuvre to extricate it, sometimes having to lift the helpless woman off before they could get the sledge upon the crust again.

It was cruel work. The dogs, giving the best they knew, steamed and panted. June, for all her splendid fitness and endurance, only possessed of a woman's strength, felt the slow, leaden lassitude of exhaustion stealing over muscles and nerves. This thing could not go on long, she knew.

Only the Indian remained undaunted, able still to match strength and cunning against the forces that were gradually closing upon them. In this ultimate test of fitness to environment, he triumphed. He was the anchor about which they swung. Should he

fail or accident come, their case would be desperate indeed. . . .

Now as noon approached, another element began to make itself felt. Though the warmth of the low-hanging sun was feeble, yet it proved sufficient with the warm wind to soften the snow-crust, and now the sledge broke through continuously, bringing the dogs up with a jerk.

At last, on one of these occasions the final misfortune occurred. The sledge careened so suddenly that Gertrude was flung heavily half-across the factor upon his broken leg. His shout of agony brought the others and, while he sat with livid face, the inert form was lifted off, and June and Jim Albert examined the injury. The splints had been moved, and the newly knitting bone wrenched. How serious the damage might be they did not know, but it was obvious that this method of travel must be abandoned and another devised. They had reached the *impasse*.

As noon was so near, they made their camp and boiled tea, and while they drank it, sodden

with weariness, they discussed the question.

"Let's try this, father," June suggested, at last. "Let Jim drive you on two or three miles and leave you. I'll wait here with Mrs. Temple till Jim can drive back and get her. It will be slow, but——"

"And ask the dogs to travel nine miles to gain three?" asked Magregor, gently. "No, June, that won't save us. With the grub we've got we might as well stay here and face things out." He shut his eyes for a moment, and his face seemed very grey. Though the others had suffered on this journey, his torments, both physical and mental had been infinitely greater.

After a few moments of silence his eyes opened and he spoke again cheerfully, almost gaily.

"After all, it's quite simple," he said. "Why didn't I think of it before? You three hurry on down to the Fort for help, and leave me behind. I'll make out grand, I know."

June looked at him quickly, undeceived by

the lightness with which he offered the sacrifice. To leave him now after his recent hurt was unthinkable, and the words of refusal were on her tongue when Gertrude, who had sat huddled on the snow like some broken Buddha, raised her bleared eyes and spoke.

"Forget it," she croaked. "If anybody's goin' to stay, I am. I'm done. I can't take another step, and I won't." She licked her cracked lips, staring weakly from one to another. "God, I'm tired! I can't walk. I *can't*, I tell you! What do you expect of me anyway?" Two ready tears coursed down her cheeks. "That damn sledge! I'd sooner *die* than touch it again."

"But we oughtn't to leave *you*, Mrs. Temple," said June, hopelessly. "We'll get along somehow. We'll——"

The other turned on her.

"What do you talk like that for? You know you want to leave me. You want me to die." She paused a moment and then added with incredible bitterness: "You win. Ain't that enough for you?" Then the

torment of her outraged body overwhelmed her again sweeping aside all considerations but its own imperative demand. Every nerve and tissue cried aloud in agonized protest. To rest, to rest! Ah, nothing mattered now but that! Under the goad her mind cringed with the cringing of her flesh, and her long purpose of revenge grew clouded, wavered, and at last broke. Dazedly she turned back to the factor. "Go on without me, d'ye hear? I've wrecked this thing like you said I would, but nothing could have stopped me from coming. But I'm done now. I can't move, and I won't! And you needn't argue. I won't go. I've stood all I'm goin' to. Do you hear? All I'm goin' to!" She relapsed into her Buddha-like attitude, and her eyes closed.

Magregor did not argue. He merely shrugged his resignation, and once more Gertrude Temple had her way as she had always had it. But quite without a thought or word for his uncalled-for chivalry.

"It's best," he said, quietly, "but Mrs.

Temple, ye need be in no danger. Men will start back for ye within an hour after we arrive. We'll leave all the grub here but a mouthful, and if ye bide as I tell ye, ye'll pull through all right."

Gertrude made no reply, and Magregor commenced to plan, his lips compressed.

"Jim, see if ye can find some shelter for Mrs. Temple. We haven't time to build one. And June, divide the provisions and blankets."

The Indian wasted no time. Walking along the foot of the rocky hill, a spur of which they had rounded before the halt, he examined the snow-covered slope keenly.

Fifty feet up he found what he sought, a natural hollow in the hillside, almost a cave. With wood and provisions a trapper could have held out there indefinitely in actual comfort. Reporting his find, he commenced to cut a great supply of dry wood, while June transferred the blankets and food to the shelter. Finally, they half-carried Gertrude there, and shook her from her stupor into a state of consciousness.

"Sleep all you like," June told her. "If you stay in the sleeping-bag and protect your face, it won't matter whether the fire goes out or not. You have plenty of matches to start another. With your rifle you needn't be afraid of anything; nothing will harm you. Make your grub last two days. The men ought to be here on the third. And most of all, stay where you are. Don't go away. The search party will come straight here, and if you're here they'll find you. It's perfectly simple and you'll be quite all right."

Gertrude nodded mechanically. She seemed in a stupor. June repeated her instructions, and then, after the fire was blazing brightly on the floor of the cave, she returned with Jim to the sledge. Ten minutes later they were off on the last desperate lap of their journey.

CHAPTER XXV

TRAILS CROSS

GERTRUDE TEMPLE emerged from a black stupor to the glow of pleasant hallucination. She seemed to be in her New York apartment, that place of luxury, safety, and laziness. Still, she wondered why Yvonne hadn't closed the windows and turned on the heat; the north-west winds sweeping across the Hudson made her bedroom very cold, she thought. And she felt strangely weak and hungry,—quite certain she was going to be ill.

She opened her sticky eyes with difficulty and the vision vanished as a pale yellow sun blinded her. She looked up to see the overhang of the little cave where she lay, and after a dazed moment the whole ghastly truth rushed back. And in the gradual realization

came overwhelming despair. Tears of misery rose to her eyes. What would become of her? What, oh what had she done to earn this?

Her feelings of cold and hunger increased until dominant instincts in her urged sharply to self-preservation, and she fought her way up to a sitting posture despite the agony of her stiffened muscles. As she searched for matches she remembered that the sun had been in its present position when she saw it last. She must have slept the clock around.

With infinite difficulty and pain she broke a few twigs and started a fire, adding larger and larger wood as it grew. The heat striking her shrivelled, grimy hands made her shiver gratefully. She found she was thirsty and filled a saucepan with clean snow to melt.

Everything was near at hand, and Gertrude did not walk. She hitched about her narrow domain, or crawled on all fours, looking, with her tattered furs and bedraggled, unkempt hair, like some creature half-human, half-animal—a survivor of the Cave People.

With trembling eagerness she opened the caribou-skin grub-sack at her side. Hers was not the sharp-toothed hunger of health nor yet the pain of fasting. It was the continuous, gnawing torment of semi-starvation, the mortal anguish of dying tissues.

She was travelling the way of death and she knew it, and the sight of her handful of provisions filled her with a sudden, terrified panic. Wild-eyed, she sat trembling. Was she doomed to starve here by inches? God! that couldn't come to her. No, no! The thing was preposterous; it didn't happen to people of her class. Some poor Indian or trapper, perhaps, but not Gertrude Temple, known up and down Broadway, star of "A Magdalene of the Snows."

But no! Not star of that, any more, or of anything. Only a fallen star whirling dizzily through space to an obscure end. . . .

She vaguely recalled that she must stay here three days, so divided her provisions into three equal parts. Then she laughed crazily at the sight. What nonsense to cook three times

what was not even one meal. She swept them all together again.

Jim Albert had laid the few stones for the fireplace, and now the saucepan was full of tepid water from the melting snow. Gertrude drank some, set some aside for mixing with the flour, and put the rest back to heat for tea. She managed to balance the frying-pan upon two stones in the midst of the flames.

Twenty minutes later appetizing odours filled the air, and she sat trembling with eagerness, her eyes a-glitter, scarcely able to restrain herself. When the food was still underdone, she could wait no longer, but feverishly helped herself, making a feeble attempt to take only the allotted third. But, on the flood-tide of the irresistible instinct to live, she failed. Never before had she known the necessity for iron control, and it was scarcely to be expected that she could summon it now.

When she had finished, half the food was gone, and she had awakened such a craving for more as almost conquered her. But what

she was impotent to do herself, sudden panic for the future accomplished. She put the remaining food away but continued to drink great quantities of scalding tea. Its warmth and the feeling of nourishment she experienced, made her drowsy, and throwing fresh wood on the fire, she crawled back into her sleeping-bag. She fell at once into a sodden, animal oblivion.

When she awoke next it was night and she was aching from head to foot. There were no stars in the sky, and the air was damp, penetrating. A few embers of the fire still glowed red, and she was raising herself painfully to throw on more wood when a sudden roaring blackness enveloped her, and she seemed to be sinking, whirling through a vast abyss, dizzy and powerless. Then, at the extreme moment things cleared again, and she found herself prone, panting fast, one hand against her breast. What this was she did not know, but it brought fresh terror.

Then, as she lay there, the night seemed to become strangely alive. Intermittent gusts

of wind roaring through the trees seemed the hoarse respiration of the forest. There were strange snappings and scuttlings as of creatures running across fallen leaves. The oppressive terror of great spaces, alien and predatory, weighed down upon her with that mystery which, from time immemorial, has evoked, in primitive minds, legends and gods and demons.

She lay stark awake, cold with the sentience of her awful aloneness. And out of her terror she created anew that refuge which her primordial ancestors created in their first terror-haunted isolation—God. But so afraid was she for Self, that God brought little comfort now, though she clamoured wildly.

Then, upon her straining ears struck a sound, a long-drawn, bell-like sound, that cleft the darkness like a blade and died away in the distance. It rose again, longer and more sustained, and louder; and the woman lay frozen, her heart scarcely beating. She had heard that voice of the travelling pack at Stellar Camp, and had cherished the memory

of it as a colourful bit of her adventures. But now its altered significance!

Was this to be the end, this inconceivable horror? Had she been chosen, as she knew some were chosen, to experience the awful fates of life,—as some men fell into boiling vats and others were dragged down in tropical rivers by unseen horrors below? “*God!* save me from this!” she panted.

Then she remembered that fire would keep off wild beasts, and sat up again, groping for the wood. But with her hand upon a stick, she hesitated. If they passed close, unsuspecting, and should see her fire, what then? Her loaded gun was no comfort to her. She had fired plenty of cartridges from a little revolver before a camera, but this would mean shooting to kill, to save her own life, and she hadn't the courage, the skill for it.

The howling of the pack grew nearer and louder, rose and fell as the great shaggy brutes running low and tirelessly, coursed on. Then when it seemed that the next moment must bring them to the mouth of the cave it-

self, she snatched up the rifle and held it ready awkwardly. But the fearful music passed beyond her and gradually diminished in the distance. She sank down dripping with perspiration, every nerve jangling like a plucked wire.

Then came a convulsive ague of reaction and cold, and she knew that she must have fire. But her palsy was such that at first the sticks flew out of her hand as she grasped them. At last the embers blazed and she huddled gratefully in the circle of heat. And with comfort came a false sense of strength and a determination never again to go through what she had just endured. Her brain, seared with terror, shrank utterly from the thought of another night here.

Reason pleaded with her for a brief moment. She remembered June's warning not to leave the shelter, and her assurance that the rescue party would arrive on the third day without fail. But the very fact that June had said this was reason enough to cause suspicion. For suffering had distorted truth until now she

believed that June had lured her on this disastrous journey only to leave her to die. And she cunningly determined to defeat that plan.

Acting as always on impulse and spurred by terror, she justified her course with sophistry. If the rescuers really were coming she would meet them; if not, she would be moving, fighting to the last, not dying like some chained animal. With hands that trembled she began to gather things together, ready to pack at the first glimmer of dawn. She had a watch, a dainty jewelled thing suspended by a platinum chain about her neck, but it had stopped three days ago and she had never wound it. She sat and gazed towards what she supposed to be the east.

The grey light came at last from the opposite direction and, when she caught the reflection of it, she immediately completed her preparations. "I must save the food," she told herself, and ate only a mouthful or two. The remainder she put into the bag with some of the utensils. The others, no longer of use,

she discarded. Then she strapped on her snow-shoes, and with the loaded rifle in one hand and the pack over her shoulder, started.

She was possessed by the satisfaction that comes of acting on one's own decisions for one's own good. She found the noon camp of two days before, and the plainly discernible trail the Magregors had taken south. This she followed, surprised at the ease with which she walked, for her long period of inaction had rested her greatly. Her only annoyance was that limbs and will sometimes failed to co-ordinate; she had a constant tendency to continue along straight lines rather than follow the curves of the trail.

She had maintained her dogged, regular progress about two hours when it commenced to snow. There was no wind now and the big flakes descended gently, kindly. Gertrude did not mind the snow. It made things warmer and cosier. Then she commenced to realize that the trail was growing dimmer before her; presently it became entirely invisible.

The full import of this fact suddenly flashed upon her, and she halted, transfixed by a new panic. Instinctively she faced back. Perhaps she could regain the cave. It seemed the warmest, safest place in the world now. Oh, why had she ever left it! But the back trail was gone even as she debated. She stood still, fighting that breaking down of all barriers that would mean madness. Then she faced forward again. She could follow the direction of the trail. Hope lay that way and, clinging to hope, she went on.

Now she walked bent forward, her bloodshot eyes straining to follow the least mark, her rifle barrel tracing a wavering line behind her in the new snow-fluff. Sometimes she stumbled as her snow-shoes clogged. There came moments when she could find no sign of the hidden trail. Ahead she saw a long crack where a mass of snow falling from some tree had split the crust. Again hope surged up in her warm and new, and with a little gasp of relief she turned aside and went off among the trees into the unknown.

It was the last flicker before the end. She wandered aimlessly. Even twigs, frozen in the crust, were buried now. The earth was a new white page upon which the furred wild folk would presently inscribe the chronicle of their doings.

With all other bearings lost, Gertrude thought of the sun and scanned the heavens. So thick was the falling snow and so heavy the grey clouds above, that the cold light offered no point of intensity. She could not find the sun. Bewildered but resolute, afraid now to stop and think, she fought on, strangely comforted by the mere fact of motion.

How long she walked she did not know. But at last the old horrible weakness assailed her, and she stopped beneath a great spruce whose feathered arms offered shelter.

"I guess I'd better eat," she said, numbly.

She laid the rifle on the snow and commenced to unpack the things. A dead tree-limb, rusty red in colour, protruding from the snow nearby, furnished kindling, and after constructing a little heap she felt for her

match box in the coat pocket where she always carried it. Instead she found a little jewel case which she had brought all the way from Stellar Camp, and then remembered that she had put the matches in the nest of tin stewing utensils.

With a sudden sensation of physical illness she dumped the contents of the pack on the snow. The stewing things were not there. She had discarded them that morning in the cave.

A dull certainty of defeat crept over her. She was beyond panic now. But the unconquerable will to live urged her to go on and on to the bitter end. She had no chance, she knew, but she could not sit down and wait. The Stranger, who, she felt, was approaching must at least overtake her as she walked.

She tried to eat the remnants of the food she had cooked, but they were frozen as hard as bits of iron. Nevertheless she put them in the bag and stood up. She looked for her rifle but could not find it. The snow had covered it during the hour of her stay. "What does it

matter?" she thought. "That wouldn't save me," and stumbled off among the trees.

She was past sensation now in body and mind. She scarcely knew that she moved; her limbs obeyed some behest of her dying will, but treacherously. Sometimes she ran into trees before she could turn aside, and twice she stumbled and fell prone over stumps.

Slowly and more slowly she walked under the pressure of her growing weakness, swaying, with eyes half-closed. Then her snow-shoes crossed and she fell and did not get up.

She returned to consciousness with a blissful sensation of hearing exquisite music. Then, as her brain cleared, she identified it as the tinkle of little bells, and its true significance gradually dawned upon her. Dogs and a sledge! June's rescue party from Fort McLeod at last!

She tried to raise herself, but could only roll over. She summoned her strength to shriek, but only gave a little feeble cry like that of a new-born infant. And all the time the bells

were coming nearer, the steady *tinkle-tinkle-tinkle* of dogs at the trot. On they came, very loud now. They would run over her if—

“Good God, what’s this! Whoa, boys!”

The tinkling stopped, and there was a scuffing sound of snow-shoes. Then a drawling voice:

“Hold on! Get out of line there a minute, will you, and give me a shot?”

In answer came the first voice, high-pitched, tense:

“If you touch that camera, Perkins, by God I’ll break you in two!”

Then came a little sound of concern and pity, and Gertrude knew that the speaker had bent over her. The next instant she looked up into the face of her husband.

CHAPTER XXVI

SEVERED BONDS

THEN, as she lay there staring blankly at him, the astounding fact of his identity shocked her into feeble but complete consciousness.

“Paul!” she gasped, weakly. “Paul!”

He did not hear her. After a quick glance at her, which had told him that this was not June, he had sunk back into the desperate anxiety which his fruitless search for her had aroused. No suspicion of who lay before him crossed his mind. It was years since he had seen Gertrude, and the fur parka, fitting closely about her face, covering chin and brow, effectually concealed contours that he might have recognized despite the pinched and blackened features. Besides, he was not even

aware that Gertrude or the Stellar Company were in the North.

Steps sounded beside them as Perkins, the camera man, foiled of his picture, lounged up curiously.

"Who is it?" he asked, bending over the prostrate form, "any of the party? Miss Magregor?—"

The words brought Temple back to the vital needs of the moment.

"No," he said, rousing. "None of them. I don't know who it is. Some woman,—white, I think, but in pretty bad shape. We'll have to hurry if we're going to help her. Call in Welch and Peter with the gun, and then start a fire. I'll unpack the sledge. If you never hurried in your life before, Perk, do it now!"

When the other, aroused to the urgency of the need, had gone, Paul turned back to the woman. Drawing a flask from his hip pocket, he slipped one arm beneath her shoulders to raise her, and held the flask to her lips. She drank feebly and then choked as the fiery

stuff contracted her throat. But she rallied to the stimulant and made another effort.

"Paul!" she said again, this time hoarsely but plainly. The thing was uncanny. While he stared, the three rifle-shots rang out that would call in Welch and Peter who were ranging the forest one on either side of the sledge in the hope of crossing the Magregors' trail. Then, vaguely, through the grime and altered looks of the woman, Paul saw the outlines of a long unfamiliar face, and caught the first glimmer of the truth. And, as if to aid his reeling memory, he heard her whisper:

"Gertrude."

"*Gertrude!*"

It was almost a shout. He bent closer, searching her face with eyes that seemed to sear. Then after a moment he breathed, "My God!"

"You!—*you!*—*here!*" he said after a dazed moment. "I don't understand—I—" he stopped, distraught, his brain whirling.

Then the first crackle of the fire that Perkins had built came to him, and reminded him once

more of immediate needs. He sprang up and ran to the sledge where he rummaged in one of the packs.

"Here!" he said to Perkins a moment later, handing him the things. "Make tea first, and then some of this gruel."

Then he ran back to Gertrude and, kneeling down, commenced to loosen her torn and almost useless snow-shoes. He felt a need for activity, for things to do while he absorbed the shock of this strange encounter. He could not, dared not, think for a little while of all it meant.

Throwing the snow-shoes aside, he picked her up and carried her the few yards to the fire where Perkins had already spread a pile of blankets. He wrapped her closely in these and then turned to other details. Presently he brought the tea and, cooling the cup in the snow, held it, and supported her while she drank. Then he moved her back from the roaring fire that threatened to scorch the blankets, and made her drink a second cup.

The hot, potent liquid revived her, and gradually her face lost its livid hue, though her nerves and limbs lay under a soporific stupor of exhaustion. At last she spoke, with less effort now, for her brain had the detached clearness characteristic of her condition.

"How dramatic!" she said, feebly ironic. "Husband and wife meet—in the wilderness—after long separation."

If any proof had been needed to establish her identity, her words furnished it. But he could still scarcely credit his senses.

"You—here!" he repeated, stupidly. "How on earth— What are you doing in the North, Gertrude?"

"Leading lady with the Stellars. Doing a big feature at Loon Lake. Had my own company, too."

He missed the pitiful boast.

"Stellar! They in the North?"

"Yes, and Bergman was along. You remember Bergman?"

"Yes."

It was Bergman looming upon the horizon

who had divided them finally, but the memory of the fact aroused no resentment in him now.

"Well, I had an awful row with him." Her eyes darkened, and her voice became faintly triumphant. "And I left him—stood him up in the middle of his picture!"

As nothing else could have done, the statement of this act brought back to Paul the remembrance of their impossible union. She was unchanged, then. Life had taught her nothing!

She went on:

"When I left him, I had no one to turn to but you—and I started south with the Magregors to——"

"The Magregors!" The words burst from him. "You met *them*? Where are they? How—" He broke off, all his allayed fears aroused again. She watched him with a sardonic, bitter look.

"Yes, I met 'em. The old man had broke his leg, and they were in a cabin only two miles from our camp. . . . I found their shack when I got lost in a blizzard, and stayed with

them. . . . I knew they were going south, and after my row with Bergman, I made 'em take me. The old man didn't want to, but I made him."

Perkins came from beside the fire with another cup of tea.

"Gruel ready in a minute," he said.

Paul took the cup and again held it while Gertrude drank. When he had lowered her to the blankets again, she went on. After her long hours of solitude and terror, speech was grateful.

"Old Magregor said I couldn't stand the journey south, but I didn't believe him. We were awful short of grub, and I played out. I'd have died if I'd gone another step, and I made 'em leave me behind,—in a cave."

"Leave you!"

She misunderstood the sharp exclamation.

"Yes. I couldn't go on, I tell you! It was killing me. I didn't care what happened——"

"But where are the others?"

She understood now. It was they of whom

he was thinking, not of her. Again bitterness and hatred showed in her eyes.

"Oh, they went on," she said, angrily. "They must be at the Fort by this time. They were going to send men back for me." There was a pause. "I suppose you came up here looking for *her!*" she grated.

He could not be oblivious of the sneering challenge. It answered many questions that had been clamouring at his mind. Gertrude connected him with June. How much did she know?

"Yes," he said, simply.

"And instead you found me, your wife." She gave a little laugh. "Well, I told 'em I'd get to you, and I have. The devil looks after his own!"

"But I don't understand," he said, in an effort to divert her mind. "You said they left you in a cave, but I found you here."

"They did, but alone in that place—" she shuddered with a recrudescence of her terror—"God! I couldn't stand it. The silence . . . the wolves. I swore I wouldn't stay

there and die that way, and I started on alone."

How utterly, how mercilessly, she revealed herself. He saw it all now. From the first of this tragic business (he could glimpse with surprising sureness all that had happened at Loon Lake) she had imposed her will and desires upon events—forced Magregor to take her, forced him to leave her behind, started out blindly alone. It seemed a strange whim of fate that he should have been destined to save her from the certain death she had earned.

Perkins approached again, this time with the gruel, and taking it, Paul fed her slowly. It was a lengthy process, and neither spoke. Then gradually, under the stimulus of the heat and nourishment, her tired brain faltered, and her eyes drooped drowsily. He wrapped the blankets snugly about her. The heavy eyes opened and looked at him a moment.

"Forget it all now, Gertrude," he said gently, "and just rest. That's what you need more than anything now. You're per-

fectly safe and nothing can happen to you. We know just where we are, and we've got plenty of grub, so you needn't feel afraid."

How different this from the meeting she had imagined between them; he angry, violent, pleading for his liberty, and she queening it, scornful and unyielding. His gentle, almost tender attitude was surprising, a little mystifying. What it would have meant to him to have her die! she thought. And yet, he could have accorded an utter stranger no more scrupulous concern and care than he had rendered her.

Ah, that was it after all. So far as concerned his life she *was* just that—an utter stranger! She cringed inwardly and her lip trembled a little. She said nothing, but closed her eyes again. She would rest as he had said. It was a strange sensation to obey him. He would take care of her. . . . Suppose she had let him take care of her all these years! . . .

Certain that she slept, Paul rose softly from her side and went to help Perkins with the preparations for departure. Five minutes

later Peter, the Indian, and Welch arrived, in response to the rifle-shots, one from the east and the other from the west. As simply and briefly as he could, Paul explained the situation, laying emphasis on the fact that the Magregors were undoubtedly safe, and that the search was over.

In the midst of their low-voiced talk, Paul heard his name called so sharply that he turned startled. Perkins was kneeling beside Gertrude and motioning violently. Paul strode towards him, filled with a vague sense of foreboding.

"Something the matter here," said the camera man, anxiously. "She doesn't seem to be breathing, and her face——"

Paul knelt down swiftly. Gertrude's face was a leaden, livid hue, and she lay quite still. There was no sign of animation. With a sharp exclamation, Paul drew out his flask and applied it to the parted brown lips. But the teeth were set and he could not force the liquor through.

"Jim! Peter! Here, quick!" he called,

and the others came on the run. Without speaking they sensed the crisis and joined the desperate work with every restorative and stimulant at their command. But with no response. At last Paul thrust his hand through the tattered furs and against the heart. But no flutter of life reached him. Still they worked on, hopeless now, until even Welch, the most resourceful in this crisis, yielded with a shake of his head.

“Them things happen sometimes,” he said, half an hour later, as they started on the solemn journey home. “You see she warn’t used to hard travel an’ short rations, an’ she just nachrally overstrained her heart—or maybe she had a bad one anyway. She kep’ up all right till we found her. Then she let down altogether, and her heart couldn’t pull her through. That’s all there was to it.”

During that journey south Paul Temple thought of many things, but oftenest of Gertrude. It seemed unreal, impossible, that that poor, worn-out clay upon the sledge had

once been the woman he had loved and married. He had for her a strange feeling of detachment and disassociation, so completely had he been removed from all the past she symbolized.

They had become utter aliens to one another, he and she, not only physically but in mind and spirit. During those years while he had been growing, she had not advanced one step. He looked back to her now as across a vast distance.

Grief, in the sense of having experienced a bitter and irreparable loss, he could not feel. Yet he was stirred. To have death suddenly sever even those ties which have become bonds must bring recollections and regrets, and these came to Paul, borne on a stream of deep and tender pity.

The futility of Gertrude's life moved him most—that frantic, ostentatious search for a happiness that lay within herself, if only she could have realized the fact. Through everything—the clap-trap and tinsel of pleasure, the envious demand for a tawdry prominence

—she had never been happy, he knew. Her life had been one long, bitter struggle of self-seeking.

Self-seeking! There lay the root of her failure, for it is the law that he who gives greatly of himself to life, in love and kindness and sympathy, receives back tenfold what he gives; while he who demands all, as by divine right, is denied in exact proportion to his demands. Not only had Gertrude cheated herself of happiness, but she had encompassed her own death amid terrors and hardships.

That her nature had brought this about with fatal certainty was self-evident. Had she learned to deny herself he knew she would have been alive today. But what might that have meant to him?

In these hours of re-auditing the muddled accounts of his life, he could not refuse the thought of June admittance to his mind. That fate had thrown her in contact with Gertrude, seemed deeply significant. Frustrated in his own attempt to tell of his marriage, had she learned of it through Gertrude?

He believed that she had. There was a consciousness of his relationship with June in the very bitterness of her voice when speaking of the Magregors. Besides, with what other argument could she have forced them to bring her south to Fort McLeod? And this being so, what effect would the revelation have upon their future? A heavy uncertainty took possession of him. Were all his hopes and dreams to vanish even now? . . .

CHAPTER XXVII

REQUIESCAT

TEMPLE and Fleming Magregor, during the little silence that followed the former's words, regarded each other with deepened mutual understanding. The factor lay on a narrow camp-cot along one wall of his little bedroom at Fort McLeod, with its jumble of ledgers, arms, and hunting trophies,—while I'aul stood before him, his head gravely bent. Presently Magregor spoke:

"I was afraid, greatly afraid to leave Mrs. Temple as we did," he said in a troubled voice, "for I knew how our country sometimes affects people left alone in it for the first time. Oh," his fists clenched, "if it hadn't been for this cursed leg——!"

"Please!" Paul begged him. "You must know I understand. Mrs. Temple made it

quite clear to me before she died that you had no choice in the matter, that she made you leave her."

The other shook his head slowly for a moment.

"If she had only stuck it out where she was, the men we sent would have found her by this time!" he mourned.

Paul walked to the square, quarter-paned window and stared musingly out. It was noon and he had been at the Fort an hour. From where he stood he could see his dogs, still harnessed, lying in the snow before the door. But his companions were not in sight, and the sledge was empty, facts which, coupled with sounds of invisible activity, told him that the factor's orders were being obeyed; for Magregor, when he learned of Gertrude's death—news which Paul felt it his duty to leave as he passed the Fort—had taken subsequent events into his own hands with gentle authority.

"No, don't go on," he had said. "Leave Mrs. Temple's body here. We have a little cemetery on the hill back of the Fort and she

shall be buried there tomorrow. My only son lies there," he added, simply. "A braw lad he was."

Paul was very grateful. The thought of going to the Graphic Camp with his burden had filled him with repulsion, and yet there had seemed no other way. Now what remained to be done would be done with fitting dignity and taste.

He turned back from the window and walked again to the foot of the bed. This man had done much for him—still more for Gertrude. During this hour's difficult conversation he had heard repeated the whole story of Gertrude's intercourse with the Magregors, and, though glossed in every way, he had been able to visualize completely the extent of its tax upon them. Their heroic endurance and loyalty had moved him deeply, and now he felt that something was due this man.

"I don't quite know how to say this," he began, haltingly. Then, after a pause: "I didn't know Mrs. Temple was in the North . . . I didn't know where she was. . . . In

fact,—for years—Mrs. Temple and I have seen nothing of each other——”

The factor held up his hand.

“I quite understand. I felt sure there must have been something like that.”

But Paul was not yet satisfied. Briefly and simply he told what facts regarding his past life and marriage he thought Magregor had a right to know—ordinary facts which, after today, would be common property.

When he had finished the factor nodded slowly once more, and, though he said nothing, gave Paul a look of complete understanding. A moment later he remarked in a different tone:

“It was good of ye to start north after us as ye did. We heard of it the minute we arrived night before last, and I needn't tell ye we're a' verra grateful.”

“I think you stood the trip wonderfully!” Paul's admiration of the man's wiry endurance was unbounded.

“Aweel, we're bred to it. All three of us came through in good shape, but we've stayed

abed and done nothing but eat ever since. We'll be as good as ever in a day or two."

There came a knock at the door, and upon the factor's word old Maria entered to inquire if she might use the big silver candlesticks at the head and feet. Permission received, she turned to Temple.

"Others go now," she said.

Paul had already heard the voices outside the window, and the jingle of sleighbells as the dogs got to their feet. When Maria had gone he fastened his furs.

"The men will come early in the morning," he said. "Briscoe will see to that."

"By eight o'clock, or things won't be ready at two," warned Magregor.

Paul nodded and held out his hand. The other took it in a warm, friendly pressure. Thereafter Temple faced the inevitable publicity and exposure of the next twenty-four hours, strengthened and comparatively at peace.

It was a solemn scene when, at the appointed

hour next day, the mourners gathered in a semicircle about the yellow pine coffin and the raw yellow gash in the snow-clad earth. About the little graveyard whose fence had long since disappeared, and whose crude crosses and headstones were buried too, the tall trees stood silent as if wise in their years and aloof from all human manifestations, having seen so many generations of men come and go. Above was an inscrutable, cold blue sky, and everywhere the dominant colour *motif* was the white shroud of winter.

There had been much to do. Briscoe and half a score of the Graphics had toiled all morning in the little cemetery, first having to thaw the iron earth with fire before they could dig the grave. With them had come a carpenter, the sound of whose hammer and saw had echoed about the Fort clearing as he laboured in the storehouse.

The remaining Graphics, after a desperate sharing and piecing out of black—Goldie Burke had appeared triumphant in a hereto-

fore unsuspected creation—had walked down to the Fort after the noon dinner. Events for them had been too stunning, too bomb-like, to permit of a full understanding and appreciation; that would come later with full and generous discussion. But several of the company had known Gertrude Mackay in New York, and all of them had heard of her, and the ready tears of her profession secured her against an unwept grave.

Paul stood beside Briscoe in the front rank. Facing them all, leaning heavily on crutches and with a prayer-book in his hand, was Magregor, risen from his bed for this event even though it killed him. Rugged-featured, gaunt, and grey, he seemed to typify the granite cheerlessness of his austere Scotch faith. June hovered anxiously near him.

It was the first time since his return that Paul had seen her, and he could note in face and figure the effects of her protracted hardships. They had met for a brief moment in the house, and, searching her eyes, even as he felt the frank and friendly pressure of her

hand, he had found only kindness and welcome. . . .

Fleming Magregor cleared his throat and straightened, and the last murmurous whisperings ceased. Only a bright-eyed squirrel chattering his impudent curiosity from a safe tree-crotch broke the profound hush. Magregor opened his book and found his place. The solemn words broke upon the still, cold air.

CHAPTER XXVIII

FACING FORWARD

CAMP GRAPHIC on this particular morning wore the general appearance usually noted after the passage of a Kansas cyclone. Doors and windows stood open to the falling snow, Broadway was lined with debris, and at the end of the street lay a hodge-podge of merchandise. Everywhere people hurried busily back and forth, voices were gay, and there was much laughter. The sound of hammering was constant. Camp Graphic was packing up.

"I'm that excited," confessed Goldie Burke into the nearest open window, "I'm registering ev'ry emotion in the calendar. If Briscoe wants some AI close-ups of Home Sweet Home, this is his chance."

Mr. Gene Perkins, the melancholy camera

man, who, in the process of changing his clothes added a festive note to the dim interior with his red flannel underwear, roared and leaped for cover. He was the first to admit that the prospect of departure made for a certain freemasonry among all hands, but there were limits.

"If you don't move on, there'll be a close-up of Good-bye Broadway," he bawled, reaching for a pillow.

She laughed merrily.

"Discovered! Eminent camera man as September morn! Believe me, Gene, you're some rosy sunrise!"

She hurried away laughing, followed by a grunt and the missile. As a matter of fact, Miss Burke was taking no chances today. In the course of her long and cold exile, there had spread through the camp an heretical doubt as to whether, after all, she really was or was not a blond. This morning laid that question forever. She was a sunburst.

"Dearie," she told Miss Tanner as the latter packed, "we go day after tomorra,

and if things don't move faster, I'll be eighty by then."

"Well, what's a couple of years, more or less, between friends, Goldie? This is the age of tangoing grandmas, you know."

Miss Tanner accepted the fact of the break-up serenely now, and was reacting somewhat to the all-pervasive air of gladness and holiday.

"Well, you little tabby!" gasped Miss Burke. "I didn't know you had it in you. But say, dearie, do you know, I'm goin' back to my husband!"

"Your what?"

The other sat down aghast on the edge of her bed. With gossip still at fever heat over Temple's wife this would be too much.

"You heard me. I feel that excited and strung up and trembly! Oh, he's the *grandest* man, if he is old!"

"Who is?"

"My husband. You know him—that old guy with the square specs and the knee pants. Sure, you know. Pa Knickerbocker. Blooey-

blooey, darling! Remember, you *would* have it!"

She departed, crowing over the other's disgusted chagrin. Five minutes later she almost ran into Jack Baillie on Broadway, who, bent beneath a load of belongings, was headed for the supply depot at the end of the street.

"Hullo, infant! Say, what's the scheme of this riot anyway?"

He scowled at her familiarity, but swung down his heavy pack. Then as he wiped his brow he explained. The hundred miles to civilization were to be covered on foot by the entire Graphic party, a comparatively simple matter since they would merely follow the frozen Onipee River south to the point where it touched the railroad. Briscoe counted on doing the distance in less than a week. The question of transporting baggage had been solved in two ways.

One of the big river scows had been set on runners, and in this would be carried such supplies, props, costumes, and clothes as the

company could not spare. At the same time all the trunks would be stacked in the prop shanty until spring when Fleming Magregor would send them up the river to the railroad. By this scheme Briscoe was remedying as best he could his one error of judgment in permitting his people to bring such a quantity of personal luggage. At the time of coming north, with open water and down-stream navigation, it had been an easy matter to freight it all to camp. But now there were not dogs enough to haul it back.

Miss Burke listened respectfully and asked intelligent questions. Baillie visibly expanded.

"By the way," inquired the lady mildly as he paused, "what do you stick around here workin' all the time for? You're young. You ought to have some pleasure in life. Why don't you go down to the Fort and spark that girl?"

Baillie, taken off his guard, whirled upon her. Would they never quit baiting him about that business?

"Her!" he sneered. "I'd as soon think of sparking *you!*"

Miss Burke simpered and gave him a kittenish push.

"Oh, Jack, this is so sudden!" she said, and ran laughing down the street.

Baillie cursed after her fervently. Why were they always raking up that affair, when he cared no more than the snap of his finger for the girl? Why, he wouldn't have her as a gift!

His affair had indeed reached a very definite ending during the three days since Gertrude Temple's funeral. No one had known of it but himself, for there had been no questions asked when, one afternoon, he opened the door of the bunkhouse stove and tossed into the flames a crumpled letter that events had rendered useless even for revenge. His only desire now was to get back to New York and be rid of this rotten crowd.

Swinging his load up again he went on. Near the sleigh-boat which some of the men were packing, he saw Goldie Burke talking to Paul Temple who was grinning broadly. All about him through the curtain of falling snow

people were shouting or laughing with the joy of release, like children out of school.

"Damn it!" he growled. "If there's anything I hate, it's to hear people laughing for no reason on earth!"

Through all this activity of preparation one dominant figure was missing. Tom Briscoe, having seen things well under way, had disappeared. Not one in twenty of his people would have guessed him to be in the living room at Fort McLeod, in solemn conclave with Fleming Magregor and June. Yet there he was, and for an hour they had been discussing the renewal of his offer to take June south with him and make her a personage.

This offer was not unknown to the factor, for the girl had told him of it during one of the long talks they had had since their return to Fort McLeod. He was in a way prepared to meet the crisis, but now the three had reached a deadlock in the discussion.

"Of course I should like to go, and it would be a wonderful opportunity," June was saying quietly to Briscoe, "but just now it's impos-

sible. I will not leave my father." She glanced affectionately at the older man, who sat fully dressed in a great chair near the fire, his leg pillowed straight before him. "We have always lived together, and now when he is almost helpless, it's out of the question to ask me to go."

The factor smiled and shook his head.

"Ah, ye're a gude lass," he said, tenderly, "but I can't agree. It would be wrong of ye to stay, and worse of me to let ye. The world's aye different with us than it was four months ago. Then ye knew nothin' but the spring fishin', and the fall huntin', the *brigades*, and the traps. But that's gone now, and ye could never find happiness in it again. The world's called ye, and ye must go to it."

She made as if to speak, but he held up his hand. Briscoe, wise in silence, was studying the girl with the keen eyes of appraisal. He saw in her face what Paul had already seen there, the woman look, in contrast to the untroubled girlishness of their first meetings. "She's lived," thought the director.

“What wad your life be if ye stayed here, my dear?” insisted the factor. “Ye’d be verra lonely. An’ what could ye luke forward to? Takin’ care of me all your life? I wouldna let ye. Ye might marry some decent white trader”—Briscoe saw June’s hands tighten suddenly—“but wad ye be content after what Mr. Briscoe has offered? Na, ye wouldna, lassie! Ye’re educated and ye’re a lady. Your opportunity has come an’ I want ye to take it. We’ll both be happier so.”

It was a long speech for Magregor, a fact which showed him to be deeply moved. For several minutes after he ceased speaking there was silence in the room, except for the crackling of the birch logs and the comfortable tick of the old clock on the mantelpiece. Then June replied.

“I can’t do it, father,” she said, with low finality. “I could never forgive myself if I left you to spend the rest of your days here alone. And furthermore, I don’t want to do it. It would spoil any happiness I might

find away from you. That's my decision and you can't change me."

A slow smile broke over the factor's face as he pressed into the bowl of his pipe the tobacco he had been shaving from a plug. Briscoe, uneasy now, squirmed in his chair restraining with an effort an almost uncontrollable impulse to leap to his feet and ramp up and down the room, erupting arguments that would crush all opposition. But reason told him that such a course here would only insure failure. He had made his plea and painted his allurements earlier. Fate must take its course.

Magregor lit his pipe, a deliberate and artistic proceeding with him.

"Since ye've said that, now I'll tell ye something," he smiled, his head surrounded by a nimbus of smoke. "I've never yet explained why the Commissioner sent for me to come to Moose Factory, have I?"

"No." She shook her head. In the confusion of events following that trip she had entirely forgotten its purpose.

"Well, he told me that after this winter the Company intended to discontinue Fort McLeod. Every winter the fur line moves farther north, and we've been out of it now for two years. I've seen this coming, and I suspected he would tell me what he did."

He puffed again in silence for a moment.

"Mr. Durfree was verra gude to me," he went on, "I might say flatterin'. He offered me the post at Independence." He paused to let the honour sink in. "But I refused it."

"Refused it!"

"Yes. I'm gettin' old, lassie. I've served the Company thirty-five years, and I'm tired. I've saved my pay, and Durfree has invested most of it for me every year, so I've enough to keep me the rest of my life."

The girl was silent a long while, staring at the floor.

"And you, what will you do—stay here?"

"Till spring, yes. The Indians will take care of me, and by that time this old leg will be gude as ever. That damage on the trip down wasn't verra serious and will only set me back

a bit. Once I've cleared up matters here and closed the post, I'll come south in the barge with Mr. Briscoe's baggage and join ye wherever ye are. Now lassie, will ye go?"

Without replying the girl rose to her feet and went to him, placing her hand affectionately on his shoulder. His arm went round her and his hand patted her gently. The next minute she turned tear-filled eyes upon the director.

"I'll go," she said.

Briscoe cannoned out of his chair and strode to the centre-table, tugging at a long, folded paper in his inside pocket.

"Fine! Great!" he shouted, expressing thus the immensity of his relief. "Here's your contract, Miss Magregor. Sign along the dotted line, and be ready to go day after tomorrow!"

When the formalities had been concluded Briscoe prepared to go. At the door he turned to his prospective star.

"Temple asked me to say that he'd drop down this afternoon to see you," he admitted,

unwillingly, and studied her face. What he saw there during the fraction of an instant sent him away cursing "this love business" as he had never cursed it before.

At half-past two Temple stopped packing and, strapping on his snow-shoes, started down the well-remembered river trail. It was his first visit to the Fort since Gertrude's funeral. The snow of the morning was still falling, borne on a gusty, biting north wind and the pile of goods at the end of Broadway was well-covered.

The landscape was dreary; overhead a dull, grey sky, to the left a white expanse of river, frozen solid now; snowy bluffs opposite, surmounted by the endless black and white forest, and closer about him the dark greens and browns of the trees. It had looked so, he remembered, on another day when he had taken this walk—the day they had learned of Fleming Magregor's injury.

Now too, as then, his happiness hung upon this journey, but today he went without the

youthful fears and palpitations of the earlier occasion. Life since then had cost him so much in feeling that he held himself under strong leash.

In response to his knock at the Fort, June herself opened the door and, seeing him, held out both hands in genuine glad welcome. Her soft, dark eyes were bright and a faint colour glowed in her cheeks. Paul noticed that she wore a blue woollen dress, and that her hair was piled on top of her head, leaving little curly tendrils in front of her ears and at the back of her neck.

She led the way to the living room, maintaining as she went a gay and ceaseless chatter. It reminded him of the childlike garrulity of earlier days, and he smiled with swift tenderness. But when she had seated herself the smile left him.

"June," he said, coming straight to the point as he stood looking down at her, "the time has come for you and me to understand each other." She met his gaze fairly. "The last time I came to see you here, I came to tell

you what you know now—that I was married. Before I could do it, Jim Albert arrived with the news of your father's injury, and I never got another chance."

"You came to tell me that day!" she said, thoughtfully. "I've often wondered if that was why you came."

"You have!" His voice was grateful. "I might have known it. It was like you to grant me that trust."

"But why did you wait until then to tell me?"

She spoke quietly, but her eyes met his with clear and serious questioning. He wondered how often she had asked herself that question since she had learned the truth.

"That is what I have come to tell you today." He watched her anxiously, his troubled, sensitive face bent. "When we first met," he went on, "I didn't tell you, because that was something I told nobody. It was purely a matter of business with me, and with Mrs. Temple also—a common enough thing in our profession. Then, when I knew

that I loved you, there was Baillie, and I didn't dare tell you."

"Didn't dare tell me!"

He sat down in a nearby chair and leaned towards her earnestly.

"No. Because I was so afraid of him—for you. June, at that time when we had first come north, you weren't the woman you are now. You were just a girl who had dreamed of people like us and of the life we represented."

She lowered her eyes and a slow flush covered her face. She was beginning to understand now. How plain her girlish infatuation for Baillie must have been!

"I kept silent then," he went on, "because I knew I had to fight him for you."

She made no reply. A gust of wind roared through the forest and thuttered in the chimney.

"If I had told you I was married," he said presently, "you would have immediately put me out of your thoughts. And what opposition would Baillie have had then? Oh, don't you see! I had to fight him with something.

. . . I knew he would defeat himself if he only had time enough, but I had to do something to hold him off until he did. That is the reason I told you I loved you then, though God knows it was the truth!"

Moment by moment she saw more clearly; her perplexities unravelled like a knotted string when the key strand is pulled.

"And everything happened just as you knew it would," she said slowly, "and oh, when I realized how—small—he was—! . . . For awhile I didn't want to live. Not because of him, but because it seemed as if nothing was good—or true."

"I know," he replied gently, "and that's why I stayed away so long then. Because I knew what you were going through, and I was afraid of myself—afraid I wouldn't have the strength to keep control and say the things I must if I came."

She saw it all now, how, in every step of their relationship he had sought, despite the cost, to do the honourable thing; not without struggle, for he was human, but with eventual

triumph. And tears filled her eyes. She rose suddenly and turned away from him so that he could not see.

He, too, got to his feet.

“And that’s all,” he said, wearily. “Can you forgive me? Can you have any faith in me?”

She turned back to him swiftly, careless now of her wet eyes.

“Any faith!” she cried, her voice thrilling as he had never heard it. “Oh, Paul! Except for one awful day—the day I first learned—I’ve never doubted for a moment. How could I doubt, when through everything you have been the one person that stood to me for honour, and the goodness and truth of life. I felt, I *knew* that in this you couldn’t have done wrong, that behind it all was some good reason. And now you’ve proved it true, just as I knew you would!”

She stood transfixed, and he looking deep into her eyes, down to her very soul—knew then that all he had hoped and dreamed of love had come to pass. A little sound broke

from him, a sound of awed wonder, and he caught his breath. Then he stepped towards her with outstretched arms.

“June! Oh, my beloved!” he called, and she with eyes like stars, came to him gladly, radiant in the proud humility of surrender.

Their lips met, and, in that exquisite moment, were swept aside all the doubts and fears of their long desire. The futile past became only as an evil dream, and they faced forward together, eager for the new life that opened to them, so glorious and full of promise.

THE END

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